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## INTRODUCTION

THE AIM OF this small, informal, and discursive book is to consider how we can have a happy social and family life under the conditions to which we are born in this country. Of course, both social and family life fall within the very large framework of living, and unless the whole process of living as we carry it on is sound and satisfactory, neither social nor family life can be happy or pleasant. That is why I have put these two aspects of living under a title which raises the general question of living soundly, living to some purpose—which alone is *living* to me, living unsoundly being in my view *not living at all*. In short, I would not deal with social and family life without raising the basic question : Do we live at all?

This would seem to be an absurd question, for none of us commit suicide, though, to be honest, I would confess that I have come to feel that a large majority of the persons I know should do so, because I cannot see any point in their remaining alive. That should suggest that when I speak of living I have something special in mind. Let me make that clear.

“In seventy or eighty years,” says Sir Thomas Browne, “a man may have a deep gust of the world; know what it is, what it can afford, and what ’tis to have been a man.” I am seventy-two years old, and whatever might be the understanding of life these years have brought to me, I find



that in India age hardly ever brings to a man any perception of the value of life or of the kind of life that is worth living.

Whenever anyone speaks to me of a man as successful or important, I put the question : What does he do? I am immediately informed about his official position, profession or business, and his worldly status, and I have to explain that I did not inquire about his livelihood, bare or ample, but about his main interest in life and his activities in connexion with that interest. Certainly, it may be that in the case of some persons vocation and profession merge. But with a majority of elderly people I meet or hear about there is no question of any vocation, or even unrealized sense of vocation, or regret for a missed vocation. I can get only two versions of living. Those who have done well in the worldly sense say that they have so much money or property; and those who have not, say that they contrived to remain alive. One group mistakes acquisition for living, and the other surviving for living. Beyond that their conception of life does not reach out. Most people sacrifice living for livelihood, a minority which consider themselves lucky for affluence. None live.

The first reason for that blindness is that we live uncritically, without paying any heed to Plato's famous dictum : The uncriticized (or un-examined) life is not worth living. That is why when I exercise some self-criticism, both as an individual and as the member of the collective entity called Indian, I am denounced as unpatriotic. To be complacent in a besotted manner has become a fixed mental habit with us.

Plato's saying embodies the methodological principle of what has been called the Socratic method, and further his first prescription for keeping a society healthy and progressive, or to emphasize the prophylactic aspect of the

method, to save a society from decay and degeneration. This criticism does not necessarily imply any rejection of established institutions and ideas, it only insists on a searching and continuous examination, to bring about revalidation. No *nomos*, no way of life, no system of values, can remain living without it. It is to be welcomed even if the criticism has to be in part destructive. To shun it, is to court decay. So, those who most love their own way of life are also its most severe critics. As the Sanskrit saying has it : "*Sneha pāpa-shankī*."

Ever since Plato set criticism going, it has remained the basis of Western thinking. There has not been one great mind in the West who has not attacked conformity and authoritarianism—and it must be emphasized that the cherished shibboleths of demos are not less authoritarian than the caprices of a tyrant. What stands behind Matthew Arnold's conception of literature as criticism of life is obviously the Platonic idea. Mill put the same admonition in a very piquant form : "Eccentricity," he wrote, "has always abounded when and where strength of character has abounded; and the amount of eccentricity in a society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius, mental vigour, and moral courage which it contained. That so few now dare to be eccentric, marks the chief danger of the time" I take it as the highest recognition of my efficacy as a writer that the fossils in the bureaucracy and academic life call me eccentric. What should I be if I were like them?

The tradition of criticism persists in the contemporary West. I was very much struck by the observation of a young (i.e., below-forty) French critic who denounced the established institution of literary prizes in France and declared that the novel, insofar as it stems from literature properly

so-called, should have promotion of values as its sole object. Sartre, too, rejected the Nobel Prize because of his conviction that a writer must be a non-conformist. "The writer," he asserted, "ought to refuse to transform himself into an institution."

But we Hindus are, and have always been, otherwise inclined. Our way of life was based on tradition and authority, which made Alberuni say that the Hindus have the habit of *jurare in verba magistri*, i.e., swearing by the words of a master. From this respect for authority they easily slipped into an absurd admiration of the life which was based on authority and tradition. By the tenth century of Christian era this Hindu belief in the superiority of their way of life had become nothing better than stupid vanity. Alberuni noted this as well. With the emergence of this uncritical spirit ancient Hindu civilization took the path to degeneration.

But with the coming of Western influences in the nineteenth century a genuine and vigorous habit of self-criticism grew up amongst us. In Bengal this criticism was the first step towards the creation of the modern Bengali culture which expanded into the modern Indian culture. From Ram Mohun Roy to Tagore there was not one great Bengali who spared either his people or their hidebound traditions. Of course, national vanity was also refurbished, and it led the conservatives of the day to attack the reformers not only unjustly but also malevolently. Tagore was driven by these attacks to a bitterness whose tragedy has not been understood even now. His resentment at the malevolence began to be expressed quite early, but its most agonizing expression was given towards the end of his life, when he had already become the symbol of Bengali vanity. In a letter to Hemanta Bala Devi, dated Ashadh 20, 1341 (1934) he gave expression to it.

I give below an English translation of the passage in the letter :

“I have nearly brought to an end my life as a Bengali. The prayer that goes up today from my weary life-span is this—If there be re-birth, may I not be born in Bengal again. Let only holy persons flourish from birth to birth in this land of holiness. I am an outcaste, may my fate be cast in such a country where conduct does not conform to the sastras, but judgment is in conformity with righteousness.”

I always say that before we can yoke Tagore to the bandwagon of Bengali self-advertisement, we have to explain that cry of agony, if not atone for it.

But no great Bengali in the nineteenth century hesitated to pay the price in obloquy to discharge his duty of criticism. This is most striking in the creator of the new Hindu conservatism, Bankim Chandra Chatterji. In many ways he was the most devastating critic of his people, and, all the more so, because he could not suffer fools gladly.

Everybody knows whom Kipling had in mind when he made the monkeys in *The Jungle Book* say, “What the *Bandar Log* think today the jungle thinks tomorrow”, or when he added that the *Bandar Log* were always talking of what great things they were going to do, but forgot all about them when the next fancy diverted their attention. But the strange thing is that many years before the publication of Kipling’s story the same idea had occurred to Bankim Chandra Chatterji. He described the Bengali people as a set of monkeys eaten up with rancour against the English, who were shown as tigers.

But the faculty of self-criticism has been decaying over

the past fifty years, and the old uncritical spirit and national vanity reviving. Both are dominant today. In one form the national vanity is an all-India vanity *vis-a-vis* foreign nations, and in another a set of provincial vanities chanting self-praise at the expense of all the rivals. I regret to say as a Bengali that this egregious provincial vanity is at its worst in Bengal.

The second reason for the blindness that we display in regard to the true value of life springs from a sordid love of money, which goes against every spiritual tradition in India.

Nowadays I see such a fervid devotion to money in every section of Hindu society that this adoration can be called the new Bhakti. In saying this I do not have in mind the capitalists, black-marketeers, profiteers, etc., from the Bania order, against whom incompetent or unsuccessful lovers of money from the intellectual proletariat have such a grudge. Here it is envy, and not principle, which is at work. Not even the most ferocious denouncer of the Bania would disdain entry into his order if that was granted. We have got quite used to seeing how easily the most left of Leftists can turn a crypto-profiteer.

Besides, one concession must be made to the Bania order. Making money is their *dharma* and, as all Hindus know or should know, one's own *dharma*, even if it leads to death, is preferable to another's *dharma*, which is to be feared. This concept of *dharma*, enjoining overriding loyalty to it, is absolutely central to the Hindu view of life.

So, knowing what the Bania's *dharma* is, no one should complain naively that he is making money by any means, honest or dishonest. There is no subterfuge in him. He has hung up the permanent notice—*Caveat emptor!* So, if a moralist wants to air his disapproval of the Bania's goings-

on, he should only go to the length of saying that the Bania is what he is expected to be.

What the contemporary moralist should really concern himself with is the extension of the cult of money to those sections of society in which, if a community is healthy, there is not only a general absence of dishonesty, but also some amount of indifference to money, for the sake of ideals, principles, or the public good. These are the youth, the intellectuals, and the politicians of a country. But it is precisely among these in India today that one finds the worst treason against moral principles as applicable to money. Almost all of them, in any case a majority decisive enough to set the tone, have come round to the view that money is everything and therefore everything should also be done for money.

I do not say that all of them have become sharks or swindlers. But when a sufficiently large number is potentially dishonest, moral as distinct from legal guilt may be said to have been established. This reminds me of some remarks made about Madame de Sévigné by her scamp of a cousin, Bussy Rabutin. She was a most discreet wife and widow, though a social star of the first magnitude, and Bussy could get nothing out of her. So he revenged himself by circulating a lampoon in which among other things he wrote :

“She is of a cold temperament, at all events if her late husband is to be believed . . . All her warmth is in her feelings, and in truth that compensates her well enough for the coldness of her temperament. Thus, if one takes account only of acts, the conjugal faith was never violated. But it is a different matter if one regards intention. To be frank, I believe that her husband pulled it off before men, but before God I hold him cuckolded.”

This was sheer malice and spite. But I do not think anyone will accuse me of libel if I say that a disconcertingly large number of our intellectuals and politicians, who should hold up the ideal of disinterested service before others, have become sharks and swindlers in the eye of God, though prevented by circumstances from becoming millionaires.

Let me dispose of our youth first. Down to the last phase of British rule they had the idealism to turn their backs on worldly prospects for their country. We saw that even in the most extreme and in one sense the least practical form of nationalism, revolutionary activity. Thousands of Bengali young men risked their prospects by joining the movement. Their guardians put forward unanswerable arguments : they were going to ruin their worldly careers and in addition, endanger the welfare and safety of their families. Yet no consideration of their own future, no consideration for their families held them back. I met hundreds of these young men as they began to come out of the detention camps from 1937, when they discovered that unemployment was going to be the punishment for their love of country. Still, I heard no regrets.

But with independence disinterested idealism appears to have vanished among them. I hardly meet one young man whose only preoccupation does not seem to be a career, and that too conceived of in the most sordid terms I feel particularly humiliated when I see this in Bengali young men. One day, speaking to the students of a Delhi college, I stressed the need for idealism and faith. The majority of the students, from commercial and cultivator classes in and around Delhi, listened to me with attention. But a Bengali postgraduate student made an extraordinary remark.

After the discussion I was talking with one of the lecturers and telling him about the decline of idealism in Bengal. He would not believe me. Up came that student, and said to me with a complacent smirk, "I don't care about idealism or faith. I should be satisfied with a good job." I turned to the sceptical lecturer and observed, "This is what I was telling you about."

I shall relate an anecdote to show how early this slime begins to ooze out. Next door to us live a Punjabi family, who have a boy of about ten. One day I noticed a very pretty boy of about three with him and asked him who the child was. On being told that he was a cousin, I observed that he was very pretty and healthy. The boy of ten lowered his voice out of respect and said with an ineffable smile, "Also very rich." This was said in English.

Now, to go back to the question of living truly. This digression has been called for by the fact that all the blindness that is to be found in respect of a life which will offer us a sense of fulfilment and happiness comes in the first instance from our incapacity to criticize life and next from a sordid materialism. If these did not vitiate our thinking and feeling we should have seen at once that real living is living in the light of an ideal, and with a sense of vocation.

I have tried to see social life and family life in the light of the highest ideals of life. But neither can be said to be the highest purpose for which we live. But without these two the highest purpose can hardly be fulfilled. So, to live a happy life in our social and family relations is the first stage of living well.

It will also be seen that I have not shrunk from probing into the sociological foundations of our social and family life. Neither can be just accepted for what they are, but must be perpetually kept moving towards an end which offers



us ever greater happiness and fulfilment. This requires a consideration of the basic facts of social and family life. Without this sifting we cannot live happily with our friends or even with our children.

## *PART I*

### **SOCIAL LIFE**

#### **Prefatory Explanation**

QUEST of happiness in social life assumes the existence of social life. Does it exist among us modern Indians? To most people the question will sound absurd, worse than unnecessary. And it would in actual fact be so, if for the purpose of the discussion that is going to follow, social life was understood in the sociologist's sense. To him all human life is social life, for no human being can be independent of society, no more indeed than an animal which lives in a herd can be independent of it. In one sense, man is less free from his social existence than many gregarious animals. For instance, a rogue elephant can break away from the herd, and live in isolation from it. Not even the worst rogue of a man can afford to do so, for in that case he will have no field to exercise his roguery, and will lose his character as a rogue, becoming undistinguishable from an ascetic or hermit. His status as a rogue means something only when it is in relation with the goodness and niceness of other men. It is the very holy man in India alone who has been able to become completely self-centred and individualistic. Therefore it is pointless to call a criminal anti-social, as it has become the fashion in India to do. On the contrary, he is so dependent on society that he cannot in any circumstance be anti-social. One might as well say that ticks are anti-canine, or lice and bugs anti-human. Good men and women in India are often indifferent to one another, but they cannot be indifferent to bad men and women, nor can the latter be indifferent to them. All the so-called anti-social elements, or in plain words, murderers, thieves, robbers, violators, seducers, and their like make an unbreakable social chain with their victims.

These relationships present what might be called the other side of the social shield for the sociologist, that is to say, for the intellectual who is concerned with social life as a series of facts, not values.

It should be obvious that I am not concerned with the social life that is created by such interrelations, nor for that matter with that which is imposed on us by our compulsory relations with other human beings, for example, with family members, relations, neighbours, colleagues, or fellow-professionals. These latter may or may not form part of our social life in my sense. In point of fact, these relationships often present a definite social problem—that of being transformed into a truly social relationship, for by themselves they may be just tolerable, or unpleasant, or even unendurable, and all the more resented because they cannot be avoided. There is a well-known French saying: “What a happiness is it to be able to dispense with the company of people one does not care for!” My idea of good and true social life is to be in the company of people for whom we sincerely care. Or in other words, good social life, true social life, consists in being positively happy in our human relations. This calls for certain qualities in our environment, in other human beings, and, above all, in ourselves.

## CHAPTER ONE

### *The Great City*

I must begin by considering the material setting of our social life, which for the purpose of this book is the city. Are great cities of India favourable or unfavourable to social life as defined by me? *A priori* they should be favourable, for whatever element in the population of the country can be called its élite, lives in one or other of the great cities,—Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, or Madras. There is also an old association between cities and culture. From very ancient times pleasant social life and polite manners have been connected with cities. In Sanskrit the word *nagarika* means not only a man from a city, but also a cultured and sociable person. The Hindi word *ga(n)war* does not stand only for a villager, but for a boor as well. The Bengali word *chasha* primarily means a peasant, but it is invariably employed as a pejorative when a man of gentle birth is found to be unmannerly: he is then called a *chasha*. The use of the English word 'boor' was originally analogous. The English words 'urbane', 'civility', 'civilization' also point the same way.

On the other hand, from equally old times a big city has been seen to be unfavourable to kindly human relations, or any human relations at all. *Megale polis, megale eremia*, ran the Greek proverb, and it was translated into Latin as *Magna civitas, magna solitudo*. It means in English—"A great city is a great desert." What is it for us? I can only

speak for myself. I lived for thirty-two years in Calcutta, as student, as a working young man, and as a married man with a family. During those years I was made to realize the cruel truth of that Greek saying. There has been no other period in my life when I was more solitary and isolated from the company of fellow-men. Yet I yearned for a sincere and sophisticated social life, because I had read novels, biographies, and memoirs in English and in French, which had given me an idea of social life at its best.

I have now lived for twenty-eight years in Delhi, and I have seen it growing into a megalopolis under my own eyes. I led the same solitary life here as in Calcutta during the first ten years of my stay, and then it was only with the publication of my autobiography in 1951 that other people began to take interest in me. That has resulted in my having wider human contacts than ever before in my life, but not with the social life of Delhi; though my life is life in Delhi. I am *in* it but not *of* it. The city itself with its social life remains more or less *terra incognita* to me. But I very much doubt if that unknown area has social life in my sense. In any case, it is not the creation of the city itself, which remains very unsocial by any standards.

Those who want to know why Calcutta was a desert to me might refer to the two chapters on that city in my autobiography, one of which deals with human life as lived in Calcutta before 1920. I have said in it that the social aspect of human life in Calcutta was killed by mere gregariousness. Today Calcutta is really anti-social. It is rent by human hatreds which make normal social life impossible. The whole of Bengali society in Calcutta is disintegrating and even decomposing.

Delhi, on the other hand, is growing and expanding still. But it is not growing socially. Its immense growth is more demographic than social. Varying the phrasing, I might say that so far as Delhi is organized, it is so mechanically and not biologically. It is a gigantic go-getting machine, and as such it has the terrifying complexity of a modern computer with its logic elements, transistors, thermistors, capacitors, resistors, and so on. This machine is camouflaged by the pervasive frivolity of the city's well-to-do

women and that of their even more light-headed daughters. The sole life-blood of the city is provided by the motive of making money, most often by illegal and dishonest means. No one wanting to do so can help coming to Delhi. All the Caravelles, all the air-conditioned coaches are crowded with them. For them Delhi is never *hanoz dur ast*.

These motives can bring people of different communities to Delhi, but they cannot make the communities cohere. But at all events the upper-class adventurers go by slabs, they look like dressed blocks of stone, though uncemented with one another. The adventurers on the lower levels, that is to say, those who are in Delhi for a bare livelihood, do not even form any sort of community however small. They constitute an immense herd of human cattle, and are wholly amorphous socially. The formless character of their gregarious existence is felt particularly strongly when an investigator goes to those parts of the city where the working population lives.

One day an American professor and his wife came to my house after paying a visit to the very plebeian quarter of Delhi, Sabzi Mandi, which asphyxiates even me, a resident in Mori Darwaza (which translated means the Gate of the Sewers). He had apparently been deeply impressed in a particular way, for he said to me :

Professor: "Mr. Chaudhuri, in the West we conceive of cities as the material bases for organized human communities and as the centres from which cultural influences spread over the whole country. But I saw something today which I cannot understand. It was all disorganization and confusion, and squalor."

N.C.C.—"I am not surprised Dr. X. You are, because you do not know what Indian cities are, especially in northern India. They do not contain organized societies. They are formed only by the falling detritus of the stratified rocks in the villages, which are not only being quarried and dynamited but are also breaking up of themselves through an economic and social weathering to which the geological furnishes no parallel."

In other words, there is in India today a sort of fluvio-glacial drift towards cities, and it is breaking up rural

India to pile up (not build) the new Indian megalopolis, of which Delhi, Calcutta, and Bombay are the three examples: they are all equally inorganic and unecological; all equally unhealthy, socially and morally; and all equally ugly. And, appropriately enough, all suffer from water shortage. The beautiful new capital that Akbar built for the Mogul Empire at Fatehpur Sikri had to be abandoned for lack of water, but these three cities seem to thrive on it. Grass dies, trees die, flower-plants die, even the earth-worms and frogs flee, but the human beings increase in two disproportionate groups—an immense majority constituted by a servile population, only earning wages at different levels without living; and a small minority of politicians, high officials, and entrepreneurs living the life of luxurious parasites. So, the growth of the Indian megalopolis along these lines has to be traced. I shall try to do it in respect of Delhi.

When I came to Delhi in March, 1942, it was still the typical north Indian urban centre of British times made up of a 'City', 'Civil Lines', and 'Cantonment', with which New Delhi, the garden city, was only in physical contact. It had no organic relation with Delhi, and the separation was emphasized by the migration of the Government to Simla, which was given up only from the summer of 1942.

These north Indian cities (minus the British appendages) were themselves only the descendants of the very much older Indian cities derived from the Middle East. They had nothing in common with Calcutta, and so after coming from that city I could not understand Delhi. It was only after seeing London in 1955 that I discovered the affiliation of Calcutta, which was with the modern European cities, I also discovered that it was only a half-caste offspring of London. Delhi, on the other hand, was a crude descendant of Damascus, Baghdad, or even the new Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar, through Pataliputra, Ujjayini, and Kanyakubja, and, of course, Muslim Delhi. Even ancient Hindu cities were so intrusive in the country that the representatives of the Brahmanic civilization, if they came into them, felt as if they were surrounded by fire or uncleanness.

Before independence the City of Delhi had two dominant

elements in its population, the Muslim traders and artisans on the one hand, and the Hindus of the Bania class on the other. Thus the main urban activity in Delhi, apart from the administrative, was financial or commercial. The small professional class was only a necessary adjunct to these groups. The Muslims were, however, more influential in civic and cultural life, and therefore the speech of polite social intercourse was chaste Urdu. Socially, the Muslims and the Hindus were of about equal importance, each in its sphere. They were segregated in separate mohallas, whose appearance and atmosphere were distinguishable even to the most casual eye.

It was this Delhi which was transformed into the Delhi of today after 1947 through the operation of two forces, both springing out of the historical situation created by independence. The first of these, and the most important, was the partition of the Punjab. It brought Punjabis in immense numbers to Delhi, and they came in two groups—the rich and the poor. The rich left Lahore and the other towns of the Punjab which had been assigned to Pakistan, before or soon after the partition, and brought with them all their liquid assets, which were very large, and most of it was ready cash. Their flight made the lower middle-class, made up almost wholly of small shop-keepers, panicky, and brought about the stampede which resulted in a virtual exchange of population in this part of India. Some of them brought a little money with them, but the majority, who could not leave their habitat without ruining themselves, came like driven game or cattle. They invaded Delhi, occupied the houses left by the flying Muslims, or lived in camps for the time being. They virtually swamped Delhi and gave it a new ethnic character.

The rich Punjabis invested their money in the first instance in house property, and all the new fashionable quarters of New Delhi have grown largely on their money. They have become prosperous landlords, and they prefer to let their houses to the foreigners who as diplomats and in other capacities are coming to Delhi in ever greater numbers, and who are ready to pay very high rents. This has made the rich Punjabis richer still.



They had plenty of money still left, and this they invested in business, which generally was in a big way. They became importers or distributors of the products of important foreign concerns. But the saturation point of the capital brought from the Punjab was not reached even with this. Therefore a third outlet was sought in the industrial field. Thus a complex of small industries grew up in and around Delhi. By its situation and resources, the place is not one in which factories would be put up. But the capitalists of the Punjab were not ready to go so far afield as to lose the benefit of their concentration, and suffer the disadvantage of competition from other capitalists. For this reason Delhi has developed as an industrial city, with certain lines of manufacture almost artificially reserved for it. There is, in addition, the ancillary industries for consumer goods, normally of a very shoddy kind, which the growth of population has called for. In sum, industrial Delhi can be said to be a by-product of the partition of the Punjab.

The lower middle-class Punjabis, on their part, could become only small traders, and at first they took over the Muslim shops. At the next step they began to compete with the established large shop-keepers and retailers of Delhi by cutting rates, which they could easily do because they had no overhead and establishment charges to pay for. This has made the lower retail trade virtually Punjabi, except in mohallas where the old Hindu retailers were strongly entrenched.

Their residential requirements have created extensive new districts in Delhi. At the beginning they occupied the houses left vacant by the refugee Muslims. But these were too few for the immense influx. So, all around Delhi there began to grow up suburbs called Nagars, whose dinginess and ugliness has to be seen to be believed. These were built partly by the Government and other public authorities, and partly by private parties, and in that case very often without proper authorization. This is what was at the bottom of the mushroom growth of Delhi.

The second force behind the growth of Delhi is a formidable *Étatism*, which might be called the advent of the Leviathan in this country,—Ah! an incompetent Leviathan,

not the Hobbesian. Socialism is only a euphemism for it, or rather a cloak. It has two aspects, bureaucratic government and centralization. Let me take the bureaucracy first.

Expansion beyond recognition of the already inflated bureaucracy of British times under the new Indian rulers was immanent in the very transfer of power which created independent India. The most active and powerful social element behind the nationalist movement which brought about this transfer was the urban land-and-moneyless middleclass, whose only idea of serving their class interest if they got political power—it should be added that political power is employed in the first instance to this end—was to provide as many salaried desk jobs as possible for its members. This could be best done by creating or having the pretence of creating a Socialistic State, which is necessarily also a bureaucratic State. This has been done, and in fact a large number of people of this class have artificially created State employment by submitting highly tendentious schemes for one kind of development or other. Thus the new Indian pseudo-Socialistic State has come to possess an enormous bureaucracy which may now look after itself through the operation of Parkinson's law.

The most significant expansion has taken place at the top, in the more highly paid ranks. As a result, for every clerk who does some original work there are about five stages of supervision by highly paid superiors. This also was bound to happen in the interest of the politicians. Most of them were members of the middle class who failed to get government jobs, and therefore, so far as worldly status was concerned, they regarded themselves as men who had been unfairly deprived of their legitimate inheritance. For this reason, after getting power, they do not show any disinclination to live wholly on the public revenues. Nonetheless, they are not wholly without qualms of conscience on this score, and so they want their sons and dependents to be provided with situations in which they can live on the public revenues without any suggestion of sponging. This has led to a phenomenal increase of posts in the bureaucracy carrying salaries above Rs. 1,000.

To turn now to centralization, that is, the control of all

political and economic activities of the whole country from Delhi. Though this might be called the most serious defect in the government of the country today, there are still a number of factors to encourage and almost force it. I set down the most important.

First, all Indians when they get power are extremely reluctant to delegate it, and normally keep even petty details of execution in their hands, clogging all business. Field-Marshal Montgomery says of the military commander that "he must be prepared to decentralize, and to trust his subordinates to use their own initiative on all matters of detail. The commander must himself stand back from the detail, so that he can see clearly the essentials of his problems." This, no Indian will do if he can help it, and the Government of India only shares as a corporate body the proclivity of the individual Indian for unnecessary meddling.

Secondly, as the legatees of British imperialism, the Indians who constitute the Government of India are suspicious of power in the provinces, which might create rival political principles, feelings, and loyalties. They are all the more so because they feel that as a central force they are weaker than the British, who besides having an administration behind them had also a unified British personnel all over India. The personnel composition of the present Government of India is itself heterogeneous. Therefore it has to be very rigid as a mere administrative organization.

Thirdly, India has become so dependent on foreign Powers for her economic development that all her economic policies, plans, and activities cannot be separated from her foreign policy, and since the foreign policy can be handled only from Delhi, the economic activities have also to be controlled from that centre.

Fourthly, there has grown up, out of the concept of India which was the core of the patriotic feeling needed to drive out a foreign Power, the notion of a unitary India which bears no relation to any fact of history or politics. Thus a hang-over of the pan-Indian feeling created by the nationalist movement is making the Government of India incapable of organizing in a federation of articulated units,

the only possible workable and rational political organization for India.

The demographic impact on Delhi of both these aspects of *Étatisme*, namely, bureaucratic government and centralization, should be easy to see. It is evident in an irresistible migration of people from all parts of India to the capital—in the first instance, as the direct employees of the Central Government, and on the next plank as the personnel needed for the needs of supply and service of that population.

But even this is not all. The bureaucracy and centralization would indeed have sucked into Delhi an enormous mass of human beings. But to these has been added another necessity created by the dilatoriness and procrastination of the Central Government, which is incurable. Though in every important, or for that matter even in a trivial, matter it has become essential to obtain a decision from Delhi, it is impossible to get it quickly. Correspondence has become a futile method of transacting business.

Of course, this is not the first time that this has happened in Delhi. This was seen after the decline of the Mogul Empire as well, and one instance of the consequences of neglecting correspondence might be given. After writing many letters to Delhi, Nadir Shah at last sent an envoy with a last letter, asking for a reply within a limit, not at all unreasonable, of six months. But no reply went in two years. So he came in person to collect the reply, and everybody knows the reply he extracted.

Unfortunately, those who do business with the Central Government today, whether they are provincial governments, business or industrial concerns, or civic bodies, cannot resort to Nadirian methods to get their replies. So they have to have representatives and offices in Delhi to unravel the knots which are always forming at the Delhi end of the string of dealings. Thus almost every important concern in India now has an office in Delhi, adding to overhead charges. Even provincial governments are setting up what might be called their legations in the capital. I see Bengal Government Houses, Bihar Government Houses, and the like. No wonder then that architecture is now a very powerful educational and vocational lure.

Even girls are joining them in ever greater numbers. The professional architects regret this because these girls normally do not complete their course, but marry after some time, to be lost to the profession on the one hand, and on the other to become terrors for them as the conceited supervisors of their work when they plan houses for the husbands. But they have to acquiesce in the feminist movement in architecture. I see enough visible evidence of this in the number of girls carrying T-squares in the streets.

The historical situation just described has brought together an immense conglomeration of human beings in Delhi for which the public utilities are quite incapable of supplying such essentials of urban life as water and electricity. The ill-served mass is divided vertically into provincial communities, and horizontally into functional classes like labourers, artisans, clerks, shopkeepers, higher officials, business executives, and so on. The provincial communities maintain their social and cultural individuality, and the functional classes are no less recognizable as such by their appearance. But the visual impression of human life in Delhi is overwhelmingly Punjabi. The others, including even true Hindustanis, can be regarded only as what the Greeks called *Metoikoi*, resident aliens.

Thus the Delhi which is constituted by well-to-do Punjabis is very much like an inflated Lahore, while the Nagars which the lower middle class Punjabis have brought into existence are a series of continuous Sarghodas, Lyellpurs, Sialkots, Jhelums, Dera Ghazi Khans, Multans, and other mufasil towns of the Punjab. Therefore the whole cast of human life in Delhi, that which strikes the eye as the most massive element, is either the metropolitan or provincial Punjabi.

I am concerned with the outward expression of Delhi life, and on account of its Punjabization, it is conditioned by the daily routine of Punjabi life, which is basically different from the routine not only of Bengali life, but also of Hindu life in Hindustan. The difference has to be made clear. The traditional routine of Hindu life was, and remains wherever it is undisturbed by intrusive activities, as follows :

I. Morning ablutions and devotions, with a light meal

afterwards for the children and at times also for grown-ups.

II. Work or business, and for people of leisure social intercourse till midday.

III. Retirement for bath, meal, and rest.

IV. Another spell of work or social rounds.

V. Late evening meal and retirement for the night.

The working hours from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. introduced by the British cut across this apportionment of the day and disturbed it, without however destroying it. The women stuck to the old routine, and the men always resiled to it on Sundays and the holidays.

This pattern will be recognized at once by those who have taken note of the daily life of landowners, tradesmen, people of leisure. It is descended from the routine followed in much older times. Raja Todar Mall followed it when he was in the service of the Mogul Court. In fact, it was already fixed in ancient Hindu times. Then even court life began early, not with the *lever* in the bedroom as in the case of Louis XIV, though. The king's formal appearance in the audience hall almost coincided with sunrise. I give an example.

In *Kadambari* King Sudraka's grant of an interview is described in these words :

*Ekada tu natidurodite nava-nalina-dala-samputa bhidi  
kinchin-unmukta-patalimni bhagavati sahasra-marichi-  
malini Rajanam-asthana-mandapa-gatam," ... etc.*

(Translation)

"Once upon a time when the sun had not risen high above the horizon, after opening the petals of the budding lotuses and slightly shedding its saffron colour, [there came to] the king in his audience hall, ..." etc.

Business and interviews continued. Suddenly the beat of drums followed by the blowing of conch-shells announced that it was noon and the time for bathing. The king at once rose and left the hall, attended by the courtesans of his personal suite, who marched with him jingling their bangles and hip girdles, and tinkling the anklets. After the midday bath—an elaborate affair, meal, and rest the King came

back to the audience hall. Such were the antecedents of the Hindu routine of the day.

But the Punjabi daily routine is utterly different. The Punjabis make it a long day, without any break for a siesta in the Hindu or Winston Churchill manner. After their morning ablutions, if they have any, and their morning walk accompanied by the brushing of teeth with a neem twig, which is also chewed for enjoyment, they have a very perfunctory breakfast of chapati and bhuja and then they go to their shops or to their work. They remain there till late in the afternoon, and return home in the evening to have another ill-prepared meal and go to bed.

My wife and I follow the Hindu routine, and therefore I get it upset by Punjabi visitors at any time from 12 to 3 p.m., and my poor wife is knocked up by the tradesmen who collect all their dues between two and four, that is, after the morning sales slacken and before the afternoon sales begin. I am too hospitable to object to the visitors, but my wife asks the dunnors to come either before noon or after four, but so far she has not succeeded in making them do so.

This period, which is the working day for the menfolk, is the gadding-out time for the women. They wander about in the streets and bazaars, making their life wholly extrovert in a physical sense. The Punjabis normally have no home life. They are inveterate agoraphils, and that is because their homes are only like lairs or nests. Does a bird ever think of sitting in its nest or on its bough when there is daylight? The bird, of course, remains in the nest for the fledgelings. But the Punjabi woman is not prepared to do even that except for the unavoidable period. So I am enabled to see little Punjabi babies with red and wrinkled skin wrapped in towels and carried in arms even in the midday sun of June. I wonder if the loafing habits of the Punjabi young men are a volitional continuation of the forced infantile gadding.

This period of gadding is spent partly in gossiping with relatives and friends, but mostly in two activities—looking into shops and eating in public places. It does not matter what the shops sell—though naturally the textiles receive the greatest attention—the women will go into them singly

or in groups and make the salesmen virtually pull their stocks to pieces. The purchases are always disproportionate to the sampling and ransacking.

The eating on its part, whether it is in the eating houses and stalls or from the hawkers and costermongers, is even more ubiquitous. There is hardly any place or any time where and when the women will not eat, and hardly anything they will not. I see magnificently dressed women, whose saris are only a chiffon on their embonpoint, who have nylon-padded high coiffures, berouged cheeks, and lip-sticked mouths, with a cucumber, carrot, radish, maize, or banana thrust halfway into them. They stand before the cane-squeezers to drink the thick and cloying juice, and, of course, they drink cocacola, orangeade, besides *mashinka-thandi pani*. The solid commestibles can be anything from pillau and kebab to dalmot. It is this intermittent eating which enables the Punjabis to do with scrappy meals at home.

It must not be imagined that it is only the people of the lower middle-class who follow this routine or do these things. The wealthy upper classes also follow the same routine, only in a more refined and disguised manner, which is called for by their Anglicization. For instance, in order to be Mem Sahibs they think it necessary to come home to lunch when they do not go to the restaurants. But even when the gadding is broken by the lunch, the break is not long. After they have paid their tribute to Mem-Sahibism, they spill out again. On account of this, the upper-class gadding is tidal, that is, it has two flood-tides and two ebb-tides as in an estuary. But, of course, this does not make any difference to the general surge of life in Delhi.

Due to this routine, the external impression of human life in Delhi is, in the first instance, all bazaar, and next all feminine. It is not the man-about-town but the woman-about-town who sets the tone of urban life, and gives to it its movement, colour, and charm. For one thing, the men who do a man's job are in their offices, shops, or places of work, and as the French saying has it : *Les absents ont toujours tort*—They go by default. But even if they had been present they could not have competed with the women,



for in Delhi one face of fashion bears no proportion to the other. The men are always ill-dressed and inelegant, and the women, on the contrary, though not always elegant are invariably iridescent and assertive. In air and deportment there can be no comparison between the sexes. Even when a husband accompanies a wife or a brother a sister, there is no obvious stamp of their having come from the same home.

So Delhi in its public assemblage would have been a swarm of queen bees, unless it were for the drones who hang on to them. It is, however, wrong to say that they hang on. Actually, what they do is to trail behind like jackals behind magnificent tigresses and leopardesses, for they are all loafers and all ill-dressed even when they think that they are ultra-fashionable.

It will be realized that with the preponderance of bazaars and women in its outward expression, Delhi is of the Islamic Middle East with a modern veneer. It is really Cairo of Tulunid, Mameluke, or Fatimid times, and Baghdad of Abbasid times, disguised by a superficial Westernization. Punjabization was bound to make it so. Therefore I think it would have been perfectly in tune with the spirit of contemporary Delhi had its bazaars also borne the names of those of Abbasid Baghdad : Suk-al-Atika, Suk-al-Atsh, Suk-al-Ghazl, Suk-al-Warrakin, Suk-an-Nizamiyal. Suk-ar-Rayhaniyan, and above all, Suk-al-Maristan (the bazar of the hospital or madhouse).

But Delhi is also Baghdad with the burqua off, which makes it more piquant, and even dangerous. The visual impression of Delhi—the Delhi that is upper-class—is such that the famous impressionist painting, *Bar aux Folies Bergeres* would seem tame and even drab beside it. The houris make it look like a sea of heaving breasts and swaying hips which, as everyone knows, is very Islamic. The loafers are transfixed by the spectacle. But I have observed that the front view shatters them, and they look absolutely *bête*. It is only when the women pass by and, turning round, the loafers take their back-view that a sigh of ineffable happiness escapes from their breast. How Islamic again!

The reverse of this splendour is an expanse of drabness,

ranging from ugliness to positive squalor which is hard to believe in without seeing it for oneself. I have chosen to keep in touch with it deliberately, so that I might not forget the realities of human existence in the capital of India. As I have written in my book, *The Continent of Circe*,—"Within the city I have seen streets running with sewage water and faeces floating on it, while, undisturbed by this, vendors of vegetables and other foodstuffs were selling their produce on the adjacent pavements. I have never objected to or minded all this, and I will say that if I have any living knowledge of my country it is a reward for this unflinching realism."

This aspect of Delhi is presented by those who work for those who enjoy the amenities of the capital of India. They are both ordinary citizens and the helots, and both have no share in whatever of architectural pleasantness is present in Delhi. Of course, there is no architectural beauty anywhere. But what is called old New Delhi nowadays (i.e., the Delhi of Lutyens and British imperialism) is at least respectable, if not beautiful. Again, the new fashionable quarters of New Delhi, with their modernistic architecture, are spick-and-span. But there is no suggestion of any kind of neatness even in the districts where the lower middle-class live. The helots live in homes which are worse than pig-stys.

It is only the latter which are admitted to be slums by the municipal authorities of Delhi. But the homes of the lower middle-class are slums in the sense in which the word is used in England. They are indescribably shabby outside, and equally indescribably drab inside. If they do not kill the body that is only because we are so tough. But they kill the mind. I get evidence of this every morning when I go out for my walks. I go to the bank of the Jumna very early, when the eastern sky has just a flush, and the river is touched with a faint pink tinge. And in the semi-darkness I hear in voices which sound like a blunt saw going through rotten wood : "*Ek rupiya chauda ane kilo.*" That the same class of people also do yogic exercises in the parks, often standing on their heads, do not prove the existence of mind in them to me.

The hovels and the jhuggis belong, not to these people, but to the true helots, and they are everywhere. They continue the side-by-side existence of magnificence and squalor, which I believe has always existed in Indian urban life. In any case, it dates from Muslim times. Delhi was roughly the same. Bernier saw this co-existence and noted it. Intermixed with the houses of the mansabdars and rich merchants, he says, "is an immense number of small ones, built of mud and thatched with straw, in which lodge the common troopers, and all that vast multitude of servants and camp-followers who follow the camp and army."

The same servants and camp-followers are still in Delhi. Only, in the more privileged ranks, they are called Class Four Government Servants. But the majority are just labourers. They are the men whose toil maintains the life of the city at the top. Bernier's summing of the appearance of Delhi is very interesting. "It is because of these wretched mud and thatch houses," he observes, "that I always represent to myself Delhi as a collection of many villages or as a military encampment with a few more conveniences than are usually found in such places." If only today's Delhi is thought of as an immense administrative camp instead of being a military camp, this description would be valid in respect of the quarters in which the common people live. Nothing seems to have altered in three hundred years except the scale of the magnificence and of the poverty, and, of course, also of the contrast.

On account of the presence of these flimsy dwellings Delhi was subject to devastating fires when Bernier was in it. Of these he writes : "More than sixty thousand roofs were consumed last year by three fires, during the prevalence of certain impetuous winds which blow generally in summer." I see fires, though not on such a scale, every year from my roof, and read of many more.

The appearance of the human beings who live in such dwellings is, of course, on a par with them. It is not only shabby but squalid. Babur related that the common people of Hindustan wore only a decency clout. In the Mogul miniatures the workmen are represented in these by the side of the more amply clad Muslim masons. The dress of the

workmen of these days is not so rudimentary, but it is still scanty, and, above all, it is distressingly inadequate. It is dirty enough and tattered enough. Children and even adults are always coming to us to ask for cast-off clothes. These men also sleep out in the open and in the streets, as Bernier saw workmen doing. My dog creates trouble for me by sniffing them early in the morning.

But the most painful impression is created by the expression of the faces. This would have given rise to repulsion, if one had no feeling of the awful tragedy. The expressions are virtually no expressions which convey any sense of the dignity of man, that dignity of expression which no Indian peasant even now lacks. The urban human expression is essentially of the megalopolis, and is to be found in its working population.

I wonder if the slave population of Rome wore such looks. If they did I should not be surprised by the servile wars of Republican Rome nor by the bestial shouts of *panem et circensis* in imperial Rome, for the expression is a frozen mixture of tiredness, despair, and sullenness. So there is in Delhi, too, a chronic and underground servile war. But the servile population now have one protection against their employers, which is the vote. With its help they can indulge their sullenness and create more squalor, but they cannot raise their life to a higher level. These men are Spartacists without a Spartacus.

Such a city (and all the great cities in India are like Delhi in essential respects) could not make a homogeneous society even of its well-to-do inhabitants, and if it comes to possess a human community, as it has done in Delhi, that is bound to be only a conglomeration of human being without a definite psychological, cultural, and social unity, and never a society. On the contrary, in its social aspect, such a city will contain, not one community, but many communities, each with its distinctive collective personality. Delhi does that, which means that it is a city of many communities.

Thus the inhabitants of Delhi who do not feel that they are only provincials and sojourners are the majority which speak Hindi or Punjabi or both, and who can claim that

their provincialism is also Indianism, and that their own collective character is also the collective entity of Delhi. For the rest, the inhabitants remain provincials like Tamilians, Maharashtrians, or Bengalis who are residents of Delhi; but who in their way of living more or less exactly reproduce the life they lead in their provincial capitals. They never submerge their provincial identity in a pan-Indian identity, and very largely confine their social life to fellow-provincials.

Thus the social life which can be said to be specifically that of the capital of India is paradoxically that which is seen in the social relations between the foreign, and more especially the Western, residents of Delhi and their Indian friends and acquaintances. The foreigners naturally want to meet Indians socially, as they have to meet them officially or professionally, and those Indians who have more or less Westernized themselves and feel the need of social life in the Western manner, also meet them. This mutual desire has created a social life in Delhi and perhaps also in the other big cities which goes nearest to my conception of social life. It was in such gatherings that I was enabled to see at first-hand the expression of European social life I had read about. This has been a very happy experience for me, and all the more so because European social custom always includes the wife. I must also add that such contacts with the Indian top-set in New Delhi that I have are the result of my social life among the foreigners in the city. Thus I can also say that, although my knowledge of ancient India is not derived from a foreign medium of knowledge like the English language, my knowledge of the ruling order in modern India is entirely the product of my social relations with foreigners, or, in other words, gained through a foreign social medium.

But this social life created by the human intercourse between foreigners and natives, on the whole pleasant as it is, has its limitations and even drawbacks. It is largely formal, and in some respects artificial and forced. It often seems to be a pathetic though happy recapitulation of the sordid story of Indo-British personal intercourse painted by Mr. E.M. Forster in *A Passage to India*. There is still

in the Indo-European intercourse a touch of that yearning of a client to be encouraged by a patron. Those who are conscious of this, overdo the Indian self-assertion, sometimes by trying to patronize the foreigner, at other times by being not quite convincingly Western in behaviour and manner.

But such sincerity and pleasantness as there is in this social intercourse is often spoilt by its exploitation for social climbing. To have foreign friends and acquaintances has become a status and prestige symbol in Indian society, and they are sought for this, even apart from the fact that many of them dispense extensive patronage in money and other forms. So they are cultivated from motives which are not always purely social, and they on their part grow conscious of the exploitation and become suspicious and wary. No satisfactory social intercourse can be built up or carried on when personal relations between two sets of persons are reduced to a battle of wits to get the better of one another. I know to what extent foreigners are pestered by the cadgers of invitations, who have become almost as professional as pickpockets. At times the angling goes much further. An assiduous cultivator of foreigners hears of a party given by an important foreigner known casually by him, to which he has not received an invitation, and he rings up to say : "This is about your party on the 10th. I have not yet got the card, but it is perhaps on the way. I am, of course, coming."

This sort of goings-on have made me follow one invariable line of conduct towards my foreign friends, and that is never to visit them unless specifically asked. They sometimes tell me that I do not treat them as friends. But there really is no alternative if you want to avoid coming under a cloud of suspicion. It is very easy to give a foreigner an impression of monetary, social, or even sensual sponging if you are over-eager. One day a most painful expression of a such an impression was given to me.

I had gone to pay a visit to a friend who was a young diplomat, but a *père de famille*. I saw in the passage a very elegant young woman with a sad smile on her face, as if she had received an unexpected rebuff. As I went in, the

diplomat said to me : "What a visitor I had!"

N.C.C.—"I saw a young woman as I was coming. Was your visitor she?"

Diplomat—"Yes, she had been ringing me up during the last few days and wanting me to come to her flat, and would not say what it was for. And now she has come in person."

N.C.C.—"Did she explain today?"

Diplomat—"No, she only said she would tell when I go to see her. I replied that I would feel most happy, but I had so much work, etc. In short, I put her off."

N.C.C.—"What could she be?"

Diplomat—"A call-girl, what else."

N.C.C.—"Oh, no, no!"

I still do not believe that was the case. She was a fashionable Punjabi girl by her looks, but with greater refinement in her expression than what these girls normally show, and I think she had some sort of a mind and was feeling so utterly forsaken in her mental life, both intellectually and emotionally, that she was seeking some companionship which would rescue her from her moral solitary confinement. But what an ill-judged move it was!

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Forms and Occasions of Social Life*

THE Indian megalopolis has thus failed to create any form of social life organic to it, or created one which is very exiguous or unsatisfactory. Actually, the great majority of the population of a big city in this country are, in their capacity as town-dwellers, only a collection of individuals physically brought together. This throws back their social life, such social life as they have in the cities, on those forms and expressions of it which were existing in the villages and which have now become deeply embedded in traditions and patterns of behaviour. This traditional social life is contained within the framework provided by blood and marriage relations; in other words they are not created by us from personal inclinations, but are imposed on us by our birth in a certain community. In short, there is no free choice in our social relationships.

When this type of social life is extended to people who are related, it is assimilated to the pattern created by the blood and marital relationship. Thus in social relations we employ forms of address which are derived from the family. For instance, I was born and brought up in early life in a small town of East Bengal, which was the creation of the British administration. People who lived in it had come there for livelihood and were not related by blood or marriage. Still we called our father's friends uncles and



their wives aunts. Young people called one another either *dada* or *didi*, or *bhai* or *bon* (sister).

Of course, I know why this happened. Hindu society is basically genetic in its outlook, and looks upon social life only as an extension of the family, clan or tribe. It is very difficult for us to get out of this mould of social life, which is really tribalism, and to acquire genuinely social behaviour. So, I am not surprised that even strangers address one another as *bhai* or *bahin*. In the streets of Delhi I am addressed as *baba*, being an old man, but, of course when I am in *dhoti* and not in European clothes.

The continuation of the social life of the village in the city still persists, and does so even in cities like Calcutta or Delhi, and that confines social life to traditional occasions for it, namely, weddings, funerals, the *sradh* ceremony, the great religious festivals, and the like. The wedding remains the greatest social occasion in our life everywhere, in the city as well as the village. Two examples drawn from old times in Bengal will vividly prove its importance. The life of children is in its most ambitious exhibitions an imitation of the life of the grown-ups. So young unmarried girls held wedding festivals by marrying one another's dolls. To these the parents contributed most liberally. Very wealthy and idle people married even their cats, and it was the boast of such a man, or at all events the boast of his *musahibs* or sycophants, that he had spent ten thousand rupees and sometimes even lakhs on the wedding of his kitten. It must be added that many people, even among the Westernized Hindus, handle the marriage of their sons and daughters in the same spirit.

But before I consider the present character of the wedding as a social occasion I shall describe it as it was in my boyhood, but I do not think in its spirit it was different elsewhere. The wedding festival was three things at the same time: an occasion for establishing your position and influence by displaying as much ostentation as possible; but it was also an occasion to show your sense of social obligation and kindness to all without distinction of rank or wealth; in addition, it was a competition to establish your equality with the family into which you were marrying, and often

an attempt to show your superiority. At its best, it was an exhibition of fellow-feeling and genuine friendliness for the people of the entire village or even three surrounding villages. At the wedding of a cousin of mine, ten thousand people from all the villages surrounding our village and from the village itself were fed. I remember that I sat down at the meal at sun-set.

The first wedding in our family was that of our sister, eldest sister. It took place in our town residence, and not in our village, in 1916. I shall describe it to illustrate the spirit of the occasion. The feast was given on the day after the wedding, and it was grand feast for at least two thousand people. Generally, these feasts were timed for midday, but they hardly ever began before three, so that by the time the meal was announced every waiting guest was ready to act the part of the hungry fox who was a very angry fox. After it had begun the feast went on till about midnight, and since the lighting was always insufficient nobody could be sure how many grasshoppers he had been able to keep out and how many he had swallowed. My father had, however, given orders that the first guests were to be served at ten o'clock, and everything was to be finished by evening. These orders were carried out strictly.

So, when I came out on the outer yard at three o'clock in the morning, I found all the servants and cooks detailed for the feast at work, and my old uncle, and the other elders assembled in the middle of the yard watching the proceedings with keen eyes. If they had only been in khaki and been provided with binoculars slung on their chests, they would have looked exactly like a commander-in-chief with his staff on a battlefield.

The feast began punctually at ten. The waiting was being done by a very large number of Brahmins who had been requisitioned for this purpose, for all kinds of cooked food became polluted if touched by a non-Brahmin. But the incorruptible eatables, which the sweets were, could be touched and even served by men of the other castes. So the boys in the house and of the neighbourhood gladly volunteered to handle them. They stood in relays and kept up an unbroken stream of sweets flowing to the house from

the confectioner's, which was about half-a-mile away. I alone among the boys, the shirker and *quid nunc* that I was, did nothing and behaved as if I was a guest. But at least I did not claim my share of the banquet. I took nothing the whole day, and felt no inclination whatever to eat. As it was getting dark the tremendous job of feeding and eating was finished. Everybody was dead tired. So, without caring where he was or what bedding he had, everybody lay down wherever he stood and slept. It was almost like bivouacing on a victorious battlefield.

The wedding still retains its old importance. If in olden days in England the meet par excellence was the hunt, the meet par excellence in our society even today is the wedding. People who will not invite brothers to dine with them once a year will easily get together any number of guests from 500 hundred to a thousand for a wedding feast. But the old sociability has disappeared to a very large extent. To invite people to a wedding is often a social obligation or liability, and equally often a means of mere ostentation. When I was in government service as a gazetted officer I at times received invitation to wedding from people whom I did not know, and who had got my name and address from the telephone directory.

From the standpoint of the invited people the situation is equally paradoxical. I get letters from relatives in Calcutta full of bitter complaints about invitations to weddings and the compulsion to spend money on presents. Sometimes this compulsory levy is given as a reason for not being able to pay ordinary bills. Yet people go to the weddings, spend money, and grumble.

I have solved this problem in my way. For something like thirty years I have never attended weddings, with very few exceptions, and these have only confirmed my determination not to make departures from my general rule. Nowadays I do not even answer letters inviting me to weddings, including those from near relatives. I can never know what they think of me, but I can imagine that they set me down for a brute. I am, however, unrepentant, and I shall give my reasons. The following are my main grievances against wedding feasts in Calcutta.

I know that beyond a formal and perfunctory greeting from my host I shall not get any genuine hospitality from him unless I am an important person to whom he will feel inclined to cringe.

I also know that I shall not have any conversation with anybody else unless I take my *yars* with me and interchange malicious remarks about everything that can be seen.

I know I shall have nothing by way of food which will be a pleasant surprise, and that I shall be able to smell all the familiar dishes in anticipation all the way, and the next morning if I pass by the house I shall get the same smell from the refuse bin, by which I shall see poor persons scraping out and eating left-overs.

I further know that I shall see people waiting sullenly for the call to eat and I shall have to rush up with them to get my share, be served with the utmost ungraciousness, and after gobbling the food I shall with greater ungraciousness, rush away, snatching the pan and taking the risk of losing my shoes at the bottom of the staircase.

Last of all, I know, if the latest fashion of making people eat off a table is followed, it will be such a caricature of the European table that it will grossly outrage my love for glass and silver.

Rather than go through that experience I prefer to be a Diogenes.

I have no experience, apart from looking from outside, of weddings in Delhi. But the wedding procession appears to be more a military expedition undertaken as a punitive raid on an enemy stronghold than a friendly affair. Indeed, so it is in form, for the wedding in northern India still retains the outward character of marriage by capture. That is why the male processionists carry sticks and keep up a mock fight; that is also why the bridegroom comes away with his bride before sun-rise, so that the bride's father might not have time to marshal his clan to rescue his daughter from the marauding new relatives. It is almost an acting of the part of Lochinvar :

There was mounting 'among the Graemes of  
the Netherby clan;

Forsters, Fenwicks, and Musgroves, they rode  
and ran :  
There was racing and chasing on Cannobie  
Lee,  
But the lost bride of Netherby ne'er did they  
see.

Those who have read Prithviraj Raso of Chand Bardai will know where the north Indian marriage has come from. Even the harness of the horse remains archaic. As regards the feast itself, the serried ranks of glum faces, both male and female, that I see under the shamianas give me the impression that it is rather a condolence meeting than a banquet. And how quickly the shamiana, the chairs, and the tables disappear. The wedding pavilion is transformed in less than an hour into a squalid thoroughfare of Delhi.

Why then are people asked to wedding feasts and why do they come? I have already said that it is all a product of the desire for social self-assertion and even intimidation. The origins of these feasts go back to zoology, and the noise that is heard at wedding processions and parties is the human equivalent of the barking of marmots, grunting of baboons, and the howling of jackals, and so it is useless to complain against the blare of loudspeakers. Before loudspeaker-days the retainers of the bridegroom yelled. At the marriage of one of my sisters, the bridegroom's people came with about one thousand peasant retainers, and they shouted all the way from the bridegroom's village to our town.

In Hindu weddings this display is occasioned, as I have said, by the fact that in many parts of India, especially the north, marriage is a survival of marriage by capture, and therefore both the sides try to intimidate the other. But the intimidation of the bride's or the bridegroom's side has now become extended into a general attempt at intimidating neighbours, relations, and clients into a proper respect or fear of the host's wealth and position. Therefore, the guests, too, reply by showing their wealth as much as possible, and the women, more especially,

load themselves with gold to such an extent that their part of the wedding pavilion can be regarded as the strong-room for bullion in banks. This is particularly true of the new rich in Calcutta.

To this has been added recently an even more degraded motive, that of social climbing. Every parvenu who wants to be a fake somebody will invite high officials, ministers, members of parliament, and even governors to get due recognition of their importance. Invitations are nowadays issued which add that "some Central Ministers are expected to attend" the wedding reception or feast. The servility of the host to these guests is painful to see; and when put by the side of their rudeness to their ordinary guests it becomes offensive as well.

The contemporary Hindu wedding feast therefore deserves to be characterized by the adjective which has become a vogue word for criminals, namely, anti-social. It is part of the biological phenomenon called "struggle for existence" by Darwin, and not the "mutual aid" of Kropotkin. To put the matter in different words, it is intra-(not inter-) social aggression.

Now, by reason of this transformation from social co-operation to social competition, the wedding party is offending in the first instance against the spirit of the Hindu marriage service, which is unsurpassed for depth, beauty, and tenderness, and is truly the verbal embodiment of a sacrament. This is not realized because those who utter the words do not understand Sanskrit. I would say that the Hindu marriage service is more beautiful than the marriage service in the Anglican liturgy. The ideal mood of the Hindu marriage is destroyed by the crude social ambition for which it has become an outlet. Why can we not confine the marriage party to the genuine well-wishers of the bride and bridegroom, who will be involved in their happiness?

Secondly, the discrimination among guests of different social positions is an offence against the Hindu concept that all guests irrespective of their social status and wealth, are Narayan himself, and we cannot treat them differently. Actually, the new practice is the extension to our social

life of the arrogance and servility of our political and business life.

The traditional social occasion which in the recent past was next only to the wedding was the *sradh* ceremony of a father or mother. It also was a means of advertising one's wealth and position like the wedding, but it was more of an obligation, and therefore every son had to perform it to the utmost limit of his means. Otherwise, his conduct would be set down as very unfilial. The heirs of the great zamindars spread no expense of this score, and there is an amusing reference to this in one of the novels of Bankim Chandra Chatterji. "The *sradh* of Krishna Kanta Ray was a grand affair", he writes, "Even the enemies said that there was real pomp and ceremony, and anything between five to ten thousand rupees must have been spent. The friends said that the expenditure was one lakh. The heirs gave it out confidentially that about fifty thousand rupees was the figure. We have seen the books, and the amount actually was Rs. 32,356.12 annas and 8 pies." In fact, the *sradh* expenses were a social death duty.

To ask as large a number of guests as possible to the *sradh* feast was as obligatory as at a wedding. In reality, many more people ate, because poor people had the right to come unasked and eat. This was a prescriptive right, and nobody dreamt of turning them away. At a wedding feast, too, people came unasked, and in Calcutta I was told that they might even be a five per cent of the male guests and more among women guests. The managers of the feast could spot them, but like shopwatchers at big stores in England they said nothing for fear of scandal. However, eating at a wedding feast in this manner was considered undignified and improper. But no such stigma attached to eating unasked at a *sradh* feast.

People came from far and near to have their share of it. I have read accounts in old newspapers of people coming to Calcutta in pre-railway days, walking even fifty miles, to eat at the *sradh* feast of a Calcutta grandee. One report spoke of a woman being confined in the boat when crossing the Hoogly river, and once in my native town I was asked the way to a *sradh* feast in it by a Brahmin who said that

he had come from the neighbouring district.

Many people ate more than once during the long day of the feast, and in order to prevent this, because it was a great drain on the stocks of eatables, the common people who came to eat were rubber-stamped like voters today, at the *sradh* ceremony of a wealthy relative of mine. On another occasion I was among the managers myself, and we found it impossible to tackle the unasked guests. So, one of them came forward to handle them for a little consideration. He knew all of them, and let them in by one entrance and let them out again by another. Nobody minded this, and, indeed, many considered it great fun, and to allow people to eat in this way made them feel good.

In regard to the *sradh* ceremony and its social aspect I am speaking from my experience in Bengal, because I do not know how this is managed in northern India. But in respect of the third important social occasion the practice certainly is uniform all over India. To come trooping to a house of death, and become vicarious mourners, is a definite social obligation as well as a secret pleasure. At all events, I find no trace in these visitors of any awareness of the awful fact that death is the perpetual companion of life. They seem to consider that it is only a contingent risk not to be taken seriously.

These people will probably say that it is by so doing alone that they can live on, for to take death seriously would be to weaken their major interest in life, making money, and to deaden their minor pleasure which is to enjoy women. They do not possess sufficient vitality to be able to carry on either activity with the idea of death as life's counterpoint. They have no awareness of the basic condition under which all of us live and which was so magnificently defined by Victor Hugo: "All men are under a sentence of death, with only indefinite reprieves."

But the ironical fact is that though they can overlook their own death, they cannot ignore the death of others, which lays on them the duty of offering condolences. But through their very insensibility they have arrived at a reaction which does not make them uncomfortable. For one thing, they pull long faces over the death of persons about



whom they have not cared tuppence. There is hardly any sight more repulsive to me than the procession of sympathizers who put on that kind of face at the door of the house of death. I would sooner look on a flock of vultures sitting round a dead cow.

The realistic aftermath of death in a family is not edifying. Very recently I have seen normal frame of mind restored to sons and their families by the death of a propertied mother who had made their existence intolerable for years by her caprices, selfishness, hatreds, and vindictiveness. She had forced them to retaliatory behaviour of which they themselves felt ashamed afterwards : so their proper moral balance has also been restored by the death. La Rochefoucauld has said that some parents behave in such a manner while they live that they give reason to their children to be satisfied when they are dead. I seemed to have seen an illustration of this terrible maxim.

I can also give many instances of the insensitiveness of surviving relatives or dependents to the death of very near relatives or patrons. Here are two from my personal experience. In the first case, which occurred in Calcutta, I was accompanying the bier of the aged mother of a high government official. On our way to Nimtala Ghat we were passing College Square and were just before East Bengal Stores, a cloth shop. The official made a sign to his nephew who was in charge of the arrangements, to buy the saris needed for the cremation from that shop. The nephew replied that he would do that near the Ghat. But the official asked him to buy them then and there, because the Ghat shops would charge more. (How much more?—I asked in wonder, being at that date a young man inexperienced in the ways of the world.)

My second case is also from Calcutta. I was at Nimtala Ghat for the cremation of my maternal grandmother. When I arrived there a big pyre was blazing fiercely, and on it I could see the body of a tall and powerful man. The other attendants were probably sitting nearby, but close to the pyre was an elderly man, obviously the personal servant of the dead man, and he was rolling on the ground in inconsolable grief, and sending forth the cry : "*Kartago*,

*kothay gele?*" ("O master, where are you gone?") His grief was genuine and acute, but that did not make him forget the practical side of his business. From time to time he got up to peer into the pyre in order to see if his *karta* was burning properly.

Once he saw that although the flames were lapping the head of the man the cranium was not cracking. So he got up, took a bamboo pole, and, striking with all his strength, shattered the skull of the *karta*. The brains fell out, and began to burn with a crackling noise, and the man again rolled on the ground and wailed : "*Kartago, kothay gele?*" This was the first time I was at a burning ghat in my life, and I was horrified.

I would not say that these cases are quite typical. But when perfectly decent and even affectionate people can behave in this way, the reaction may be taken as an organic part of the general pattern of the behaviour of living persons towards death. The fact of the matter is that except for certain specific relationships men do not feel death very acutely after the first shock is over. Often there is no shock at all.

Grown up people do not feel the death of a father or a mother very much. In the first case, there is the deed-box to console him, and if there is nothing in the deed-box, its emptiness at least bequeathes indifference. In the case of the death of a mother there is always the wife as a greater consolation. Only young men feel the death of a mother with some sort of agony. A wife's death is felt painfully only by the small minority of husbands who love their wives.

But the really excruciating sorrow is felt by a man or a woman when a child dies. This seems to snap the tie with life, and even when no outward sign of sorrow is seen the wound never heals. In the Bodleian Library I have gone through the journal in which Max Müller recorded his thoughts and feelings at the death of eldest daughter at the age of sixteen. I have not read anything more terrifyingly tragic in literature even. He was never the same man again. But for this very reason I would not go to offer my vain and trivial condolences to a man or a woman who has lost a

child. For the rest, let there be only holding of the tongue in the face of the silent goddess, Death.

But there is another reaction to death which is independent of our will and emotions, and which takes us deep down into the elemental, both biological and psychological. I do not know whether people are conscious or would be willing to admit that the spectacle of death always has an impact on sexual life. It would seem that death as the extinguisher of life sends human beings back to the source of life—love or lust.

At the same Nimtala Ghat long ago I became aware of this association too. I was there for the cremation of an uncle, a very handsome, fair, and imposing person in life. They were washing the body with ochre-coloured Ganges water and I was standing by. Across a mud-flat, about one hundred yards away, three women were standing with their backs to us. One of them turned and saw us, and then all three began to pick their way daintily across the mud bank to come and see the body of my uncle. They were obviously prostitutes from the nearby houses. The burning ghat seems to have an endless fascination for them.

They came near us and stood looking at the body. One of them was very young and her figure, clearly seen through her thin white sari, was almost perfect. But what was more remarkable still was her expression, one of round-eyed wonder and perplexity. After a while she walked away and I had a feeling that she was going back to her monotonous and boring profession made endurable only by harsh fits of physiological excitement, with a renewed zest.

Such is death as a psychological experience in life as lived by normal human beings. It may be looked upon as tragic or comic according to mood or temperament. But to make it a social matter seems to me almost sacrilegious.

There is another expression of our traditional social life which does not go as far as that, but is still tiresome and a nuisance. It is the traditional Indian habit of making illness, and more especially a serious illness, as frivolous a social gathering as a cocktail party in New Delhi.

Before I describe this frivolity I should like, however, to put on record that illness in a village or a small town in old days called forth a very noble social feeling. In those days there were no hospitals except in large towns and even when they existed few were willing to go to them. There were also no professional nurses. So all the nursing had to be done by the members of the family, helped by such neighbours as volunteered to come forward. Fortunately, in every town and village there were quite a number of men and women whose only vocation seems to have been to give this help without there being at any time any question of remuneration. I have seen them at work I hardly know how many times.

But you have to take the bad also with the good of a system. There always came with these selfless men and women a whole corps of busybodies and gossips who did nothing but sit together and gabble away. Besides them all the neighbours, relatives, fellow-villagers, or fellow-townsmen felt constrained to come as a bounden duty even when they were not impelled by that overpowering curiosity about illness in general which is so prevalent amongst us. Therefore the house of sickness was always crowded, and the usual courtesies,—smoke, betel, water, and so on, had to be kept at hand for the visitors. The men visitors usually sat in the outer house relating their previous experiences of the disease and giving advice as to the best method of treatment. The women visitors thronged the sickroom or crouched on one side of the floor or in a side verandah, watching the patient very keenly. They had the appearance of a flock of vultures near a carcass, but their hearts were the hearts of doves. It was from their wails that the assembled guests in the outer house normally received the intimation of a crisis in the patient's condition. These weird banshee calls always sent them running towards the inner house.

For the first time in my life I saw this exhibition when I was very young and one of my sisters had cholera. Almost the whole town constituted our visitors. For them chairs and benches were laid out in the outer yard. It was February and the weather was fine, and so they could sit outdoors

and talk and discuss as long as they liked. These chairs and benches were almost always occupied. My sister passed out of danger at the end of some three weeks, but she remained very weak for about two or three months.

The same kind of scene was repeated when one evening about three years later one of my younger brothers swallowed a whole betel-nut and was choked. My father was out of town and was expected that night. In his absence my mother took the reins in her hand. We the elder brothers with a large number of our friends scattered over the town in batches and, calling at the house of every doctor, tried to get together as many of them as possible. The neighbours and the friends of the family, too, trooped into our house, and soon there was a large crowd inside it. As it was the cold season a fire was lighted in the middle of the hut, and the guests warmed themselves before it. In about fifteen minutes of the coming of the doctors the crisis in my brother's condition was passed, but as he remained in a state of stupor the doctors and the visitors thought it advisable to stay on for a little while, particularly as my father was not present and somebody had to be there *in loco parentis*. This evening lingers in my memory as one of the most animated of my life. It was enlivened by good humour, good jokes, and witticisms, and the most unclouded of high spirits.

To conclude the discussion of the social aspect of illness, I shall relate the story of my brother's revolt against the tradition of corporate interest in illness, although it belongs to a later period of my life. The incident took place in 1922, when my brother was married and was an advocate of Calcutta High Court. A woman relative of my father was to have an operation in a hospital in Mymensingh town, where at the time our family was temporarily staying. All her own people and the other relatives, near and distant, were going to the hospital to be present there at the time of the operation by way of showing their sympathy. My brother was asked by my father to represent him at the function, since he himself could not go on account of the serious illness of my mother. He flatly refused. He said that he saw no use in going as he would not be

admitted into the operation room nor even allowed to see the patient at any time. He offered however to go to the house of the relative and make inquiries. My father replied that that would not do and explained that somebody had to go to the hospital even for mere form's sake, because as everybody else was going someone would be expected from our house and the absence would be noticed. Still, my brother stuck obstinately to his guns, and since neither I nor my younger brother was at Mymensingh at the time, my brother's not going meant that nobody at all would be going from our house. My father was extremely vexed and remarked that on account of our self-willed behaviour he could not keep up appearances in society and was being made to look rather a fool,—‘a son-pecked’ father—before his relatives. Even that did not soften my brother. He stayed at home and heard afterwards that the others had taken big cannisters of food with them to the hospital, so that the day-long waiting on its verandah had been quite like a picnic.

It will be seen from all this that the most important manifestations of our traditional social life were collective, and not personal. So they remain still, though modified and weakened in certain aspects. Is there then no personal social life? There is, but that, too, is canalized very largely through kinship by blood or marriage. Therefore the most important expression of our personal social life is to be found in the visits by relatives.

These visits are really domiciliary visits. The coercion exercised by our family relationships, established either through blood or marriage, I regard as an infliction and a torture. The elderly male relatives behave in a fashion which recalls to my mind the inquisitorial questionings of the political police in Bengal in the British days. They will pry into one's personal affairs with a persistence that in any other society would be regarded as gross impertinence and effrontery. They will not respect any personal feeling. The elderly women relatives, on their part, are regular harpies or Gorgons. After they have visited a young woman they will leave her unhappy or sulking for days. I would not, of course, say that there are no exceptions,

but these exceptions where and when they exist only prove the rule.

To me this officiousness and curiosity in relatives has always been a proof of our want of individuality. I revolted against it very early in life, and I shall give an example. I had to adopt glasses for bad eye-sight very early in life, and I was, of course, aware that glasses on a youth were regarded in my young days as a sign of moral depravity. An elderly relative once observed to me : "At this age you are wearing glasses. Do you know that your grandfather (whom I had not seen) never wore glasses till the end of his life?" With incredible cheek I replied : "I cannot say that reading has done me any good, but the fact is that I am being made to read in a week what my grandfather never read in his whole life. So my eyes are what they are." That silenced him, but it did not raise his estimate of my modesty.

But such boldness has saved me throughout my life from the inquisition by relatives. I have never admitted it to be my duty to receive a relative unless he was mentally of my kind, and in the upshot I found that by keeping relatives at a distance I could create for myself a more or less satisfactory social life. Indeed, I have spared myself a good deal of unnecessary mental suffering by jettisoning relatives *qua* relatives. But in general in Hindu society the awe felt for the *rishtedar* is equivalent to that felt for the Czar in old days in Russia.

I think I have already pronounced a verdict on the most common form of social life existing among us, which is the mutual visiting and entertaining among relatives. But I shall make it more explicit. Whatever traditional hospitality existed among us is perhaps most atrophied precisely within this framework human relations, i.e., the framework created by blood and marriage relations, in which it was most marked in old times. In those days the visit of a relative, old or young, was the occasion of a pomp and ceremony which is nowadays exhibited in the case of a VIP. I have, even as a very young man, received this effusive welcome whenever I went to the house of a relative.

It seems to have disappeared virtually. According to the testimony, almost unanimous, of all my acquaintances, partly supported by my own observation, cold-shouldering of close relatives by close relatives has become a painful phenomenon, and it saddens me to hear that this is most common among upperclass Bengalis. While the old social life is perishing the void created by its disappearance is not being filled up by an alternative form of human intercourse based on the friendliness of unrelated persons.

The unrelated person is hardly ever entertained unless he has the power to promote the worldly interest of the entertainer. Entertaining from simple friendliness is sometimes objected to by the wife on the score of trouble, and by the husband on the score of expense. But the interested hospitality is so repulsive to me that in my own social life I never ask anybody who has any power to do any good to me. Thus, when I was in government service, I never asked an official superior to a meal until he had retired and left the department, and I never visited an official superior.

Eating together is one of the most important signs of friendship, says the *Pancha-Tantra*. Let me give its characterization of friendship.

*Dadati, prati-grihnati; guhyam akhyati, prichchhati;*

*Bhunkte, bhojayate ch'aiva;—Shadvidham priti-Lakshanam,*

—Or in English : “Gives and receives in return; tells and asks about intimate matters; eats and feeds—are the six signs of friendship.”

All these have virtually vanished in their disinterested form, except perhaps obscene intimacies. That leaves only gossip as the most important expression of voluntary social life left to us, and it must be admitted that by its continuity and amount it almost makes up for the loss suffered otherwise.

Gossip was always the traditional recreation of women, and of old men. Working men normally had very little of



it, for the simple reason that they could not spare time for it. But this is no longer true, for all workingmen now-a-days talk interminably in their offices at the expense of the employer. Even at post-office counters talk is the main business, and attendance on the public secondary. But whether this can be called social life is a question which will be taken in its stride by the discussion of the spirit of our social life in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Spirit and Content of Social Life*

Such experience as I have had of social life among us Indians has not encouraged me to take a favourable view of it. It is arid in the first instance, but it is also positively unpleasant at times, when it becomes a competition in the assertion, vocal or silent, of the superiority of one individual or another. The alternative is acceptance of inferiority. The latent arrogance on the faces of those persons whose names appear in the newspapers, which is on the surface in large formal gatherings, repels me. But in the last few years I have been meeting a larger number of my country-men (including country-women) than I ever did, and I am veering round to a more hopeful view. There is, of course, a good deal of what is undesirable, but I also meet character and behaviour which make me think that something might still be done to salvage our social life, even though, as things stand it is partly a wreck in the waters of self-seeking and ostentation. The obstacles are formidable, for they spring out of the social life as it is practised and from its spirit. Nonetheless, it does seem to me that an energetic and decent minority can still bring into existence a satisfactory and even happy social life among themselves.

I shall give a general survey of our social life, in which I shall indicate the elements of behaviour and character which make for a pleasant social life. It is created by inte-

rest in the personality of other people, and this interest may be intellectual or emotional. But this interest is itself dependent on the faculty of perceiving that there is personality to be interested in. What I cannot explain about my people is their extraordinary insensitiveness to points of character. "He is a good or a bad man" is the final summing up of a man's character with us, and I have hardly been able to get any idea of another man's personality from the talk I hear at secondhand about him.

This lack of perception comes, not only from lack of social education, but also from something else which is interwoven with the very structure of our character. Hindu society never learned to value man as man, as an individual, as a personality, without reference to his worldly status. It is a regimented society in which the individual is only a pawn. In this society every individual has to be dull, and thus cease to be individual, in order to enable the collective entity called Hindu society to survive, and to do so as a fossilized community.

Social life is an outflow and meeting of personality, which means that its end is the meeting of character, temperament, and sensibility, in which our thoughts and feelings, and sense perceptions are brought into play at their lightest and yet keenest.

This aspect, to my thinking, is realized as much in large parties composed of casual acquaintances or even strangers, as in intimate meetings of old friends. I am not one of those superior persons who hold cocktail parties in contempt, looking upon them as barren or at best as very tryingly kaleidoscopic places of forgathering, because of the strangers one has to meet in them; which is no argument, for even our most intimate friends must at one time have been strangers to us. These large gatherings will be only what we make of them : if not anything better, they can be as good places to collect new friends from as the slave-markets of Istanbul were for beautiful slaves or New Market for race horses.

But they do offer more immediate enjoyment. For one thing, in them one can see the external expression of social life in appearance and behaviour at its widest and most

varied,—where one can admire beauty of body or air, hear voices remarkable either for sweetness or refinement, look on elegance of clothes or deportment. What is more, these parties are schools for training in sociability, for in them we have to treat strangers as friends. So, in them we see social sympathy in widest commonalty spread, or at least should. We show an atrophy of the natural human instinct of getting pleasure and happiness out of other human beings if we cannot treat strangers as friends for the moment. And I would go further and paraphrase Pater to say that not to be able to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, even when we meet them casually, is on this short day of frost and sun which our life is, to sleep before evening.

So, it will be seen that my conception of social life is modest, for it makes no demands on what we *have*, though it does make some on what we *are*. Interest, wonder, sympathy, and love, the first two leading to the last two, are the psychological prerequisites for social life; and the need for the first two must not be underrated. We cannot make the most even of our intimate social life unless we are able to make strangers of our oldest friends every day by discovering unknown areas in their personality, and transform them into new friends. In sum, social life is a function of vitality.

It is tragic, however, to observe that it is these very natural springs of social life which are drying up among us. It is becoming more and more difficult to come across fellow-feeling for human beings as such in our society,—and in all its strata. In the poor middle-class, in the course of all my life, I have hardly seen any social life properly so-called. Not only has the grinding routine of making a living killed all desire for it in them, it has also generated a standing mood of peevish hostility to other human beings. Increasing economic distress in recent years has infinitely worsened this state of affairs, and has also brought a sinister addition, class hatred. This has become the greatest collective emotional enjoyment of the poor middle-class, and indeed they feel most social when they form a pack and snarl or howl at people who are better off than they.

Their most innocent exhibition of sociability is seen when they spill out from their intolerable homes into the streets and bazars. I was astonished to see the milling crowds in the poor suburbs of Calcutta. But even there a group of flippant young loafers would put on a conspiratorial look if they saw a man in good clothes passing by them either on foot or in a car. I had borrowed a car from a relative to visit a friend in one of these suburbs, and he became very anxious when I had not returned before dusk. Acid and bombs, he said, were thrown at cars almost every evening in that area. I was amazed. But I also know as a fact that my brother was blackmailed to pay five rupees on a trumped up charge when passing in a car through one such locality.

The situation is differently inhuman, but not a whit more human, among the well-to-do. Kindliness for fellow-human beings has been smothered in them, taken as a class, by the arrogance of worldly position, which among the Bengalis who show this snobbery is often only a third-class position. When these people throw large parties these are either the traditional wedding feasts or buffet meals in the Western style. Through them they try to discharge their social duty wholesale, but what they actually do is to give an exhibition of self-importance or class hauteur. It is the consensus of all sensitive and cultured persons that the only effect left in them by such parties is a painful recollection of invidious treatment, both by fellow-guests and by the host and hostess. It would seem that such social gatherings are used only to assert the superiority of some over others, and to establish a peck order in company.

I was one inveigled into joining one such party in New Delhi, which will certainly be my last participation in them. It was a party to say goodbye to a well-known figure of the city who was going abroad. I have been to many such receptions held by foreigners in New Delhi, and at them I have invariably found the host and hostess as well as the chief guest and his wife standing near the door and receiving the other guests. But in that party the chief guest arrived late with his family, remained for a short while in his own

circle, and then moved to the buffet. When the other guests took this to be the opening of the meal and went forward, they were turned back by the host and asked to wait until the chief guest and his friends had eaten. After eating these people left, without considering about thirty others who had been asked expressly to meet the important person. What surprised me most was that none else thought this to be an outrageously discourteous exhibition of self-importance; some even found extenuation for such behaviour.

This kind of parties make those who have sensibility and culture but cannot refuse the invitations, put on a sort of protective armour. They behave figuratively like tortoises afraid of hostile animals. They withdraw their neck into the shell and wait cautiously. If they do not feel VIP kicking against the shell they slowly begin to stick out their neck. First of all, a sharp nose appears tentatively, then a pair of bright twinkling eyes, and last of all, if the exploratory gestures have been reassuring, there comes out of the formidable shell a very engaging person indeed, just like the prince out of his beastly form in the fable. Even I, though I have no worldly position, have seen others tortoisising in this way before me.

Small and informal parties which have been arranged or have resulted from chance visiting are even worse, for in them the unpleasantness becomes concentrated instead of being diffused as at large parties. It has become virtually impossible for people of equal culture but differing worldly position to meet on a footing of friendliness. I have heard of the wife of a Bengali of good social position living in one of the prestige quarters of New Delhi in a good house, being received with reptilian coldness by the wife of another Bengali in a higher official position. In fact, it is out of the question for a person of average social position to visit a person of above-average position except only to "pay respects" or have *darshan*. Even when a caller has been given an appointment it is usual to keep him waiting, and if a good-natured friend of the important person draws attention to the fact that somebody is waiting, the standard reply is : "Let him wait. Who is he?"

This type of behaviour was brought home to me when I was in Calcutta by some very unexpected remarks. Even when some visitors came with a previous appointment, they asked me to pay no attention to them if I was otherwise busy and to keep them waiting as long as I liked, and upon a second visit they told me that their curious friends had asked if I had talked to them. To withhold *kathamrita*, or nectar of speech, is recognized as a means of asserting one's importance.

But it would be wrong to assume that even a gathering of those who admit one another's equality would be pleasant. In them, perhaps the most innocent and friendly thing is the lading out of smut, which becomes more salacious among the "England-returned" ones, who have been able to shed either their "ingenuous shame" or Hindu prudery through their stay abroad. For the rest, there is personal gossip of the most sordid or arid kind, and, above all, malice against the absent—justifying the French proverb : *Les absents ont toujours tort*.

The blighting effect of such malice on social life can be easily imagined. It is impossible to have enjoyable social life without giving oneself away to a lesser or greater extent, without forgetting caution, without succumbing to self-abandon, without even displaying some vanity. But in the society that is ours all this giving oneself-away comes home to roost as recollections rankling with intolerable bitterness. All that is said in malice comes quickly, and is even brought by friends who do not feel that in recounting the tales they are either sprinkling acid or driving a red-hot chisel into the flesh. The sense of humiliation immediately freezes all social expansiveness in us.

I came upon an example of this during a recent stay in Calcutta. A Bengali who had established some position there wanted to make my acquaintance and invited my wife and me to dinner. I spent three very happy hours in his house, in the company of his wife and children, and a most cultured Calcutta solicitor (which many would regard almost as a contradiction in terms). I found my host to be frank, manly, impersonal in conversation, and very pleasant. As he was driving me to his house, he told

me that he had not been brought up in Calcutta and was finding the upper set there mean, malicious, and given over to spreading lies and slander. I soon discovered how correct he was. As soon as others heard that we were at his house they began to ask what sort of person he was, for they had heard that he was an unscrupulous adventurer. I found that he had acquired a bad reputation even among strangers, and that certainly through the kindness of his acquaintances. The general implication of such a case is unpleasant. But what surprises me is that no one resents the disloyalty of those whom he calls his friends.

This is a very brief indication of the unsatisfactory state of social intercourse among us and I could easily have made it longer and more circumstantial. But even after reading it, sketchy as it is, people will probably ask : If all this is true, what hope can there be for any social life in a desirable form? But, I would repeat that the experience which has made me draw a dark picture, has also revealed to me the existence of elements with which an attractive social life could be built up, provided there was both energy and courage.

My hopes are based on three discoveries : that there are individuals who possess considerable social capability; that our women can be brought into our general social life so as to remove its greatest shortcoming; and that conversation, which as a social grace is virtually absent among us, can be created. But all this is potential and not realized. Let me consider each of the elements.

I frequently meet persons who not only have the desire and even yearning for social life of the best kind and are sick of its present bleakness, but who also possess considerable social capability in the way of warmth of heart and sympathy, information and knowledge, and mental cultivation, with civilized interest and good manners.

The most agreeable thing about the presence of this social capability is that it is not connected with economic status, especially in Bengali society. Those who have it come from the entire range of the middle-class, with the genuinely poor at one end and the very rich at the other. It is always a matter of character and temperament,



and not of money. But, of course, those who come from the well-to-do stratum have certain advantages: they are more polished and more self-confident; that is, more developed socially, though sometimes in the wrong way, and are not merely embryonic as the poor ones are.

But these individuals are so few and isolated that they do not feel even that strength which their small numbers could give them if it could be mobilized to pull its weight together. Furthermore, these persons are both discouraged and demoralized by the apparent strength, stridency, and vulgar self-assertiveness of the upstarts.

Those who are poor or have moderate incomes are very different. They are overconscious of the lack of money and worldly position. Therefore it is very difficult to draw them out socially. They are like heavy musical instruments from which a good tone cannot be obtained without disproportionate effort. Moreover, I have noticed that even when they want to show courtesy they fall short of effectiveness, on account of which their sociability does not register on those who are used to more free-flowing affability. They give an impression of being cold when they are only shy. The sociable persons from the well-to-do stratum, on the other hand, show another kind of atrophy: they become hardboiled and cynical. Altogether, both the wings exhibit the frustration natural to those who constitute a struggling minority among an uncivilized majority. Neither would take pains to be agreeable to others.

It is therefore largely a question of giving the diffident more self-confidence, and the cynical more geniality. But that can be brought about only by creating a new social life away from what I would call our "Social Establishment", by basing it on social attraction and not social intimidation. But to try to do so by setting up formal social clubs would not succeed. It is my experience that such clubs die of inanition. The only way is to have personal social life more actively, that is to say, at home.

This, however, has an economic implication, for social life at home, on however modest a scale, calls for some expense. So the initiative must be taken by the sociable and civilized persons of the well-to-do part of our society,

who will have to make special efforts to win over the civilized poor. I would only add that whoever sets out on this social crusade should resist the temptation of giving the movement added impetus by roping in cultural lions of the big cities. Though they might be lions in culture, socially most of them are rogue elephants who have lost all attachment to the herd.

The main obstacle in the way of building up a satisfactory social life is incapacity for conversation. It is the weakest feature of our life as social beings. We are naturally taciturn and secretive. But this should surprise no one who knows our traditions. In the light of Hindu ethics, talking is moral depravity, because it is supposed to erode spirituality. It is equally condemned by Hindu worldly wisdom, because talking means commitment or giving out secrets. This discredit of talking is reinforced by the fact that the most plausible and incessant talkers among us are those who want to wheedle or cheat us. In women talking is regarded as even worse; it indicates not only lack of modesty but even of virtue. The most charitable view of a good conversationalist is that he is light-headed and frivolous.

Now, whenever a natural human impulse is placed under a taboo it inevitably breaks out at its worst or lowest—the sexual attraction as lust, good living as gluttony, and conversation as shop-talk, tittle-tattle, smut, or slander. The only forms of talking recognized as legitimate by the traditional Hindu code of manners are these: talking for earning money or match-making; disputations among the pundits; and homilies from holy men. It will be seen that all our modern conversation, with more or less de-nationalization, comes within that framework of the permissible.

Thus Hindu moral values prevent the growth of conversation as a social art, and after that the Hindu mode of living does its worst. It is gregarious, noisy, lacking in privacy and leisure, full of intrusion and impertinence, and thus destructive of civilized mental communication. Few people realize that, as human expression, conversation is no more natural than is writing. Both need mental development in the first instance and after that mental activity in solitude. One might say that non-utilitarian talking

stands in the same relation to a full and active mental life as the water which is used as hydraulic power does in relation to the reservoir created by the dam. That is to say, in respect of both, storage must precede discharge. But, on the contrary, our mental development is in itself low, and even that scanty source is not allowed to become some sort of a pool, because the bazar that our private life is, makes us fritter away our power of speech even when we are engaged in serious work. None is saved for social enjoyment.

Apropos of conversation, I shall quote a little bit from Jane Austen. In *Persuasion* Anne Elliot says of some of her high-placed but dull relatives that they are nothing in themselves, and then explains her point of view. "My idea of good company", she says, "is the company of clever, well-informed people, who have a good deal of conversation; that is what I call good company."

At this point, I believe I ought to correct a wrong anticipation. Without in any way deserving it I have acquired a reputation of being an intellectual and a learned man, and this notion might lead the reader to think that I equate social life with academic seminars. On the contrary, I have a genuine horror of "intellectual conversation" at social gatherings. In India, and among us Bengalis more especially, it always degenerates into altercations between doctrinaires or into competitions to show familiarity with the grist-to-the-mill found in the literary journalism of London, Paris, or New York. I avoid all that like poison.

It must not be inferred from this, however, that my conception of social life excludes wanderings towards the higher reaches of the mind. Supposing you are having social life in the Western manner, you may of course bring in Plato, Kant, Sartre, or Malraux as you please, but you must also talk a little about your hostess's china and glass, without in any way implying that Kant has been above her head. In good social life all topics, provided they are civilized, have almost equal status, and what matters is not the subject but how one treats it. Here conversation is not a journey towards a destination, but only sauntering.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Women in Social Life*

There is no doubt that the greatest shortcoming in our social life is the virtual segregation of men and women in it. Even when the women are present physically there is hardly any intercommunication between the sexes. Can they be made to play a more active part in it? Before I attempt to answer this question I shall sum up the present situation.

The truth of the matter is that since the Muslim conquest put an end to the freedom, chivalry, and sophistication of the man-woman relationship among the ancient Hindus, we have never been able to recover them. Yet old memories were reawakened as soon as the Bengalis of Calcutta began to see English social life.

In 1824 Amelia Heber, wife of Bishop Heber, gave a birthday party to her husband, and besides the Governor-General Lord Amherst and Lady Amherst and other English guests she also asked some notable Bengalis. Hari-mohan Thakur looked at the party and observed : "What an increased interest the presence of females gives to English parties." The Bishop reminded him that the introduction of women into society was an ancient Hindu custom, only discontinued in consequence of the Muslim conquest. Harimohan assented with a laugh, but observed : 'It is too late for us to go back to the old custom now.' Radhakanta Deb was near, and he said something more

serious : 'It is very true that we did not use to shut up our women till the times of the Mussalmans. But before we give them the same liberty as the Europeans they must be better educated.' "

The education has come, but not the proper social intercourse. In spite of all the talk about the equal rights of women, in which some of the women are quite unnecessarily cantankerous and cacophonous, there is no healthy meeting between the sexes even in our most up-to-date circles. When they are together in physical presence, the rule is for both men and women to be stiff to one another, or at best formal and distant. The emulsion produced by the up-to-date mixer that the hostess aspires to be, soon falls apart, and there is seen a segregation of the women which is a purdah in public view. I hate the very sight of that. I set that down to acute sex-consciousness, and that persists because we began the mixing of men and women at the wrong end, with co-education before social mingling, then introduced co-quill-driving, both under economic pressure; and went over to social mixing with human value last of all and in a gingerly fashion. This has not yet been acclimatized.

It must not be imagined from this that I expect social intercourse between men and women to be asexual. No meeting between them, whatever its character, can be free from the colouring the difference of sex will irresistibly bring in, and to try to banish that will only create sex-obsession which, with avarice, is the worst Hindu moral failing. I see too much of it : a row of dour elders looking more dour under sexual radiation from the young women around them; men who are unable to continue a conversation when a pretty woman enters the room; more irrational old men who, as soon as a young girl enters, asks you : "Who is she?" I see no point in the question, though it is sometimes put to me, for there is nothing in the air of these girls to suggest that they are open to booking. As I see it ☉ is permissible for old men to flirt with young women on two conditions: that their own wives are present; and that they do not pursue the girls to their homes. But how much more pleasant and civilized it is to admire their

beauty, youth, and grace when they are present before us, with no following up.

As things stand, any kind of natural and friendly intercourse between men and women has been made very difficult, if not impossible. The accepted code of conduct is to keep mum about women in public, and talk smut in private. One cannot even admire the beauty of a woman, though it is permissible to ogle at her all the time. I meet nobody capable of speaking about the beauty of a girl who has appeared for the first time in society. I have not the slightest hesitation in showing admiration in my conduct or my talk.

I met a young girl twice in my house, and offered her a glass of Burgundy and a small liqueur glass of Cointreau. I met her twice in Calcutta and accepted sweets from her hand. When offering wine to her I selected the best glass I had, a Waterford cut-glass, and said to the two older married ladies who were there : "I shall give my best glass to the most beautiful person among you." The two ladies clapped their hands. Yet all the time I did not know who the girl was, and I learned her name incidentally when I was not likely to meet her any more.

Yet what should I have been if I were incapable of admiring her when she was before me? She was more full than slim, but with the sinuous grace and spring of a tigress. With that figure she combined a face which was as slumbrous as that of a new bride, and her eyes, as dreamy as those of Venus in Botticelli's "Birth of Venus", were always oblivious of the world around her. Also, I do not know how, there would appear on her cheeks, off and on, the downy bloom of a peach to set off the olive complexion. She was a young Diana, but going about with such sweet modesty that every movement of hers seemed to say inarticulately : *Ecce Ancilla Domini*. She was a Bengali girl.

The day I shall have become insensitive to such an apparition I will say like Wordsworth : "Or, let me die." I would add that my wife's tolerance of my admiration of young girls is an unbounded as God's charity, which makes for a happy married, as well as social, life.

Intimate correspondence between unrelated men and women has been made even more impossible. A French poet has said that love without letters (love letters, of course) is like a bed without pillows. Our society tends to regard all letters between men and women as love-making. A young unmarried girl and I write to each other very frequently, though we have not met. She lives in a small town, where such correspondence is bound to be noticed, especially as one letter from me was heavily scented. The postmaster assumed the letter-writing to be clandestine, and informed the father, and, of course, put a good many searching questions about the relationship between the girl and me.

All this is explained by the traditional attitude towards social relations between men and women which has been current during the last few centuries. This was a break from the ancient Hindu tradition, but as it happened, it was strengthened by a resuscitation of the ancient erotic treatise of the *Kama Sutra* by the westernized Hindus, and the wholly wrong interpretation which was put on it. Modern Hindus as a class are incapable of seeing any feature of ancient Hindu life in its true historical light. They can only garble what the European say, and add their chauvinistic embroideries. Even the *Kama Sutra*, which has become the literary symbol of ancient India to modern Westerners and their Anglicized Hindu imitators, remains inaccessible to them.

The Anglicized Hindu of New Delhi or of some such spurious place, who brags that his sixteen-year-old daughter is so revolutionary and uninhibited that she reads the *Kama Sutra* in English, is neither as revolutionary nor as Indian as he thinks he is. These fathers and daughters are only bringing their Anglicism up-to-date by falling for a book which in its degraded English versions has become a stimulant of contemporary Western sensuality. This book in the original is hard, cruel, and almost brutal in the French sense. These weaklings would be crushed by it.

Besides, these people do not know that in ancient India the *Kama Sutra* was not the housewife's reading. The

women who studied it were the courtesans. But they balanced this with strenuous physical exercise to keep themselves fit, and their curriculum also included logic, geometry, and astronomy, apart from art and literature. All of it was a professional course for them, and its application was all in the day's work. The training enabled them to pass successfully through the desert of love in which they held their court and amassed their fortune. But when they felt tired of its emptiness, by way of human satisfaction, they took a penniless, handsome young man for love, and forgot all their expertise to give themselves up to passion. While these ancient Traviatas threw away their books, the modern Anglicized Hindus seem to have recourse to the *Kama Sutra* to convert their wives into some sort of prostitutes.

The ignorance about the true nature of the *Kama Sutra* is, however, part of a larger ignorance about the entire range of the man-woman relationship in ancient India. The erotic treatises have presented a very wrong and one-sided picture of this relationship by making it appear as if all of it was a matter of sexual congress. They make Western tourists, who come to India with the intention of making part of their tour a sexual pilgrimage, sigh that contemporary India is not ancient India, so that without having to take the trouble to go all the way to Khajuraho to see such scenes only in stone, they could see them in flesh and blood in Delhi. I would say parenthetically that they could do so had they come to India about one hundred and fifty years ago. In April, 1819, when the Marquis of Hastings was Governor-General of India, at the time of the hook-swinging festival in Calcutta, a man and woman did couple publicly and swung on the Charak tree before a crowd of about thirty thousand spectators. What a pity the hippies were not in existence then to imitate this!

The ancient Hindus were neither so crude nor so narrow. Perhaps, living in a veracious world, they talked more openly and frankly about the physical aspect of the man-woman relationship than others. But they were not so stupid as to think that the relationship was only this.



To assume that, would be to make them uncivilized, for a free, gracious, and urbane social intercourse between men and women is of the very essence of a cultured existence. The gamut of the man-woman relationship in ancient India extended from the physical, through romantic love and conjugal devotion, to this disinterested but chivalrous social meeting. It is a delight to read the conversation between men and women in such association in Sanskrit books.

*Mais où sont les neiges d'antan*—Where are the snows of yester year? The disinterestedness and graciousness have disappeared to give place to an obstinate preoccupation with the physical aspect of the man-woman relationship, which is at the same time cowardly and furtive. In the eye of the modern Hindu, unrestricted social intercourse between men and women and even more friendship between them, are like the wide opening of the kheda which deceives the poor elephants into marching in to be roped at the centre. He cannot believe that the final roping is avoidable. I got a confirmation of this *idée fixe* the other day from a journalist friend who asserted it as a fact of science that a man and a woman, however virtuous, if locked in for an hour or so in a room, will never throw away this windfall of an opportunity.

I thought this truth was more in line with the Arabian Nights than science. It will be recalled that when both Qamar-al-Zaman and Badaur were put to the temptation, it was the princess and not the prince who succumbed, and the story-writer commented: "What was bound to happen happened!" I will tell a true story, got at first hand, to refute the fatalistic acquiescence in such a belief. It concerned a college friend of mine, who was also a *Guru Putra*, and so regarded as the deputy of his father.

He had gone to Benares on a holiday and was staying at the house of a *shishya*, who was dead, but whose widow, too, had taken mantra from his father. The old lady showed the greatest reverence for the young man, but at the same time, whenever he moved about the house, put her young daughter-in-law behind a bolted door. Now, it so happened at noon one day that she came rushing and crying into

his room and said that a monkey had stolen the gold watch of her son from the bedroom which was on the terrace, and she implored him to save it from the monkey.

My friend went up, saw that the bedroom door was shut, and also saw the monkey sitting on the parapet with the watch and chain in its hand and biting them from time to time. He crawled up to it with a stick and gave a blow. The startled monkey threw down the watch and gave an alarm call. The young man had just picked it and stood up when he saw scores of monkeys rushing furiously to his roof with wild barks and grunts. He was almost paralysed, when the door flew open and the daughter-in-law cried out : "What are you doing? Come in," and, dragging him in, barred the door. For more than an hour the infuriated monkeys went on chattering and throwing themselves on it. At last, hearing no noise, the girl peeped through the barred window and seeing no monkey, let him out. The old woman fell at his feet, crying desperately : "Baba, don't tell it to anybody." I can guarantee that even under the protection of a hundred furious monkeys my friend did not think of putting this hour to a use which was consecrated to it in the modern Hindu tradition. But who would believe me?

They disbelieve even under more verifiable conditions, as I shall show by relating my own experience. When I was working in A.I.R., a pretty young girl (Indian) came to work in our office as steno-typist. She was the very first girl to come to that office, and she was assigned to me. The Director sent for me and explained that she had been given to me as I was "the most responsible person" in that organization. I smiled and asked him : "How far am I to go in encouraging friendship between her and my colleagues?"

I soon found that my encouragement was not needed. The girl could not leave office without being invited to the pictures or restaurants by the men. One of my junior colleagues one day asked her in my absence : "Miss X, are you a virgin?" Heads of other sections wanted her transferred to them, and at the girl's request I had to go to my chief to have these machinations foiled. At last a very

high one sent for her and offered to make her his secretary on a doubled salary. The poor girl resigned and went home.

But while she was there it was my own humiliation which I felt most. Off and on I could see noses pressed and flattened against the panes of my door in an attempt to find out how I was misbehaving with the girl. A jealous colleague could not restrain himself, and one day he burst out before me : "You have been given her because you are neuter." This so overwhelmed me that I forgot my sense of humour and, instead of replying, "But Mr. Y, I have three children," retorted angrily, "I suppose everyone is neuter who is not one of a pack of ten dogs running after a bitch in season." That bit of coarseness effectually silenced him, though.

The obsession has thrown its shadow on married life. In northern India I meet with a neurosis among men which makes them fear that their wives will not be faithful to them because they are not capable of satisfying their desire. The most revolting form of this particular obsession is seen when the question of marrying the daughters arises. The father and the mother, imputing their own desiccated lust to their young daughter, rigidly scrutinize the young man, and if he looks refined instead of looking like a stud bull, reject him on the score of 'health.' ^ ^

It would be a mistake to think that the atmosphere has become less charged in recent years because there is greater freedom for women, more mixing of the sexes, more co-education, more working together in offices. One has only to hear the remarks of the men about their women colleagues to feel that there is no change. The currency of catchwords like 'boy friend,' 'girl friend', 'dating' or even 'call girl' does not make a society more libera, or progressive in regard to the man-woman relationship.

Nor does greater prevalence and tolerance of promiscuity, adultery, or fornication. There is nothing very original or revolutionary in these things, for in human history sexual immorality has been far older and stronger than sexual morality. The hard core of sexual irregularity remains fairly constant from age to age. However, it has

an umbra as well as a penumbra, and it is this penumbra which expands or shrinks cyclically. So, if the latter has increased in the present-day world, that is nothing very modern.

But in India there is no expansion even of the penumbra. A certain amount of promiscuity has always been present in Hindu society, despite its rigorous sexual taboos. What has really happened is that the area of the irregularity has shifted. Thus, instead of being confined to family relationship, it has spilled out into social relationships, so that the liaisons are now with the friend's wife, instead of being with the sister-in-law. In other words, it is a change in the veneer.

I give only two instances of the persistence of the obsession even in the 'modern'. Those who go to the West for training or pleasure cannot be detached about the spectacle of public and free love-making there, and look on it with a fascinated stare. They cannot forget it, and are always dwelling on the subject in their letters. They are never struck by the commonplaceness or lack of a sense of personal dignity in it. On the other hand, those who are for divesting the women of superfluous clothing, can never rest satisfied with the parts which are bared. A whole back, hips, thighs, stomach, navel, abdomen, and shoulders, they are ready to overlook even if the bikini is worn, to marvel over the parts which are left covered, sighing that though visible charms may be sweet, those invisible are sweeter.

Such an unnatural obsession cannot exist without creating an equally unnatural inhibition. The Hindus, who were probably the most uninhibited people in regard to matters of sex, are today the most inhibited and taboo-ridden. Take the victims of the two obsessions I have just mentioned. Those who gloat on the spectacle of free love-making in the West can never help interlarding their descriptions with didactic or satirical denunciations of the *ulanga kama*, naked lust, of the Occident. Those who leer at bared limbs, on their part, are always indulging in shrill outcries against the prevalent immodesty.

There can be no question of excluding the sexual attraction. The only question is this : What are the limits of

its operation? It surprises me very much that we are not making use of our social life to rescue the institution of marriage from its degradation into a commercial transaction, of which the lowest proof is the matrimonial advertisement. We have driven the only alternative to arranged marriages of the traditional type, which is love-making, into the streets and parks, and made lovers literally street-walkers. I would have unrestricted meeting between men and women for this purpose even at the risk of having some adultery.

Nevertheless, the social end of inter-sexual meeting is not marriage. When truly social, it can take three forms : friendship between unrelated men and women; *ad hoc* interchanges of ideas and feelings; and, at its most casual, admiration for the external attractiveness of women, speaking from a man's point of view. I meet a sufficient number of women to convince me that we can have all this. But if it is not developing as it can and should, that is due to the persistence of the old tradition which influences our men more than the women.

The men are, as a rule, stiff and impassive, but when they show interest they freeze the women even more. Once going to Calcutta I noticed I.A.C. hostesses showing a rigidity which was in complete contrast to what I had seen on international lines. They stood like caryatides, and handed food or refreshments to the passengers as if they were keeping in mind the caution about supping with the devil. The smiles which are so coruscating in other aeroplanes were wholly absent. I drew my wife's attention to it, and she said that if they were less cold and stand-offish the men would take advantage. -

But when not scared by such fears and more especially, if they find in the men a wholesome detachment, our women can be very pleasant. Some of them possess great social sense, which is often unapplied. A very highbrow set in Calcutta honoured me by treating me as an equal. I felt flattered. But I would also say that I found the wives to be the better half of the company, and quite capable of sizing up even their very superior husbands. On the whole, when they have experience our women show more percep-

tion of points of character, more appreciation of originality, and more awareness of the psychological ambience from which external behaviour comes. Our men have too often allowed themselves to be shrunk as full men by turning into specialists—professional, bureaucratic, commercial, and, above all, technological.

Never was I struck more forcibly by the difference between men and women in India than during a recent visit to Calcutta. This made me write an article entitled "Sexual dimorphism in Calcutta." I shall repeat the description here.

This phenomenon of dimorphism is, of course, a familiar phenomenon in the animal world. It is the difference in the beauty and impressiveness of outward appearance between the two sexes, which creates a dimorphism or two external forms in the same species. Among birds, the peacock is far more gorgeous than the peahen, and among ducks too—mallard, pochard, teals, etc.—the male is generally more colourful. To take the beasts, the lion, for instance, is thought to be more impressive than the lioness. In short, wherever the sexes differ from each other in the animal world the male is usually more impressive than the female.

But among the Bengalis in Calcutta the situation seems to have been reversed. No one, judging by external appearance, will dream of placing a Bengali man by the side of a Bengali woman in regard to smartness, handsomeness, and refinement of appearance and expression.

Taking every strata of Bengali society from the wealthy down to the very poor, individual for individual, the woman in every case looks superior. It is not simply that a woman from families of, say, the Rs. 1,000–2,000 income range, looks smarter than a man from the Rs. 500–1,000 income range; a difference is observable in each economic category. A brother and a sister from the same income-group, or for that matter even a husband and wife, look as if they belonged to perceptibly different social classes. In the lower income groups, the brothers and the husbands look as if they were the servants of the respective sisters and husbands; in the higher income-groups as if they

were the agents or major domos. It is only in the most Anglicized class (mainly, in the class in which the men are commercial executives in the new and so-called "covenanted service") that the men in any way seem to belong to the same social class as the women. But here, too, the approximation is rather in clothes than in the refinement of expression.

By the side of the women, the men present not a foil—for a foil may be quite acceptable—but a shocking contrast. How the Bengali men in Calcutta have contrived to be so shabby I cannot explain. Of course, the average run of Bengalis in Calcutta never presented an attractive sight. I have read in Strachey's book on India that in his eyes the Bengalis going about in Calcutta formed an unending procession of dull and dirty white. But this consistent shabbiness has now degenerated into a motley shabbiness in *dhoti*, pajama, and trousers. Perhaps the Bengali men in Calcutta are seen at their worst in their European clothes (with the exception of the commercial executives, who at their best look like the men in the advertisements of the textile manufacturers—which is not reaching very high). They have no feeling for European clothing.

But their expression and air are even worse. When they are of moderate means they look peevish and uncultured; when in good circumstances smug and conceited; when wealthy unspeakable. Not one man seems to be able to walk or stand gracefully. I will never say that all this external unattractiveness reflects a mental unattractiveness. But, at all events, the outside does not do justice, either in appearance or in deportment, to the inside.

Last of all, this dimorphism extends to mental life. I will be the last man to say that the external beauty of a Bengali woman's appearance reflects an inward equivalent. I daresay a very large number of them have wholly commonplace minds with very worldly ambitions. Many are perhaps as unrefined in their mind as they are elegant outwardly. In any case, very few of them have access to that mental world where the beauty of a woman's body can be supplemented by an equivalent in the mind.

I will give an example which will bring home this point.

I was returning from my early morning walk in the parks of the Lakes. Before me was sauntering a young woman in a very tasteful sari of sepia and gold. Though slightly on the plump side, she was good-looking and appeared to be refined. In her left hand she was holding a small bunch of flowers. How pleasant, I thought, to find a girl who loved flowers as much as she loved a sari!

But soon she came to a house over whose gate and railing were hanging some *Quisqualis Indicas* and *Bougainvillias*. She raised and stretched her right arm towards them, to break the twigs and steal the flowers. But as it happened, there was a shaggy mongrel (with a foxterrier strain) in the house. It came barking at her, and she ran shrieking to the middle of the road towards a ragamuffin of a boy in a dirty shirt and dirtier shorts, and then, recovering herself, began to giggle and twist, looking sideways at me.

I could not suppress a smile—but it was more for myself than for the girl. Now I half-exclaimed: "Here's some thing for your highflown admiration of the elegance of Bengali women, Nirad Chaudhuri!" This particular woman's had broken down at the first temptation (not comparable even to the apple's) and at the first crisis. I should think that the elegance of Bengali women may evaporate in other situations too.

But that certainly is not the full story. Young Bengali girls and women are extremely shy and difficult to bring out. It is perhaps easier to woo them into marriage than to get a correct idea of the contents and quality of their mind. But whenever this can be done, I have found that they have better minds than their menfolk. If a brother and sister come to visit me I have found that I can talk to the sister and not to the brother; if a husband and wife come, the wife is always the more sensitive half. I would not say that the women are superior in information—although at times they are that too—but certainly they are more alive in their responses, both intellectual and emotional.

I shall give a provisional explanation of this difference. It is indeed very provisional. Still, it would perhaps bear tentative setting down.



Bengali women have entered the world of the mind, of culture, of education, of social life much later than the Bengali men. Truly speaking, they began to come into their own only from the thirties, if not only after the end of World War II. When in the early part of the 19th century men in Bengal began to have their minds formed by the impact of western mental culture, the women were primitive and almost savage. When Radhakanta Deb or Hari-mohan Thakur spoke on terms of equality with Bishop Heber or Lord Amherst, an English woman, Fanny Parkes, who had visited the zenana of a very notable Bengali in Calcutta, wrote in her diary that these women were not educated.

In this manner, we kept them in the kitchen, the basement, and the *rez-de-chaussee* of our life for over a century, creating a dichotomy between men and women inconceivable in Europe and ancient Hindu India. The women have now broken out of that submerged world into the light of the day. They are turning the tables on us, Bengali men. They are the newcomers and the pioneers. They remain vital, while we men are spent.

Therefore I am not surprised that, as I look at the faces of even the most cultured Bengali men of today, they appear to me to be a dead, wooden lot—at best possessed of a static smugness. They are blasé, incurious, and insensitive. They are touching the lowest point of their vitality, and have hardly anything to spare from their preoccupation with their sordid worldly ambitions. Even if the dreaminess and wonder in the eyes of the young women were nothing more than physical, I would prefer that to the wooden impassivity of the men.

I shall supplement this general impression by giving at least one account of my meeting with Bengali women in Calcutta, which will show how sophisticated they can be, and all the more because the incident was connected with the most ridiculous inhibition that obtains in our society—I mean about kissing. Indians can never regard it as anything but an erogenous activity; in fact, most people would call it preliminary sexual intercourse. Yet, even when erotic, kissing can be beautiful, and, besides, it

can be loving, affectionate, courteous, and reverent. I am glad to be able to say that in my social life I have found enough evidence to convince me that the taboo comes from the most stupidly-out-of-date prejudice we have. I meet country-women who are capable of taking a most gracious view of kissing.

I have adopted the Baroque habit of kissing the hands of my countrywomen. I have kissed the hands of young Bengali girls of sixteen from the poor middle-class, as also the hands of aged ladies brought up in the "most straitest sect" of the Brahmos. None of them, I am happy to say, have set that down to amorousness. One repartee, more especially, lingers in my memory.

A young married woman came to see me in Calcutta with her husband and an unmarried girl. As usual, when they were taking leave, I kissed the hands of the ladies. The married lady said something which was very pleasant. I replied: "If you speak like that I shall not stop at the hand, but kiss your cheek." She pointed to her lovely young companion and said with a smile, "How do you know that in going away this stopping short is not her very sorrow?" This was said in Bengali, which made it infinitely more striking. A Bengali woman from the middle-class, not conventual, not Anglicized, not uprooted, and not given to grinding her Bengali syllables, who can say that, can preside most graciously over any salon. Why do we not make greater use of them to civilize ourselves? But perhaps I should reverse George Meredith's epigram that "Woman will be the last thing civilized by man," and say that we Hindu men will be the last thing civilized by our women."

I am equally fortunate in my correspondence with women, Bengali women. This correspondence is not, however, of the type that is usually seen as between an established Indian writer and his woman admirers. That style is derived from our *Guruvada*. In my correspondence there is neither pontification on my side, nor unctuous genuflexion on the other. The young women who admire me can be as truthful as they can be gracious. Here is a sample from a letter written to my wife by a woman half my age :

"Between you and me, I would tell you that however loudly Nirad Babu might abuse Bengal and Bengalis, in his heart he loves them. So far as I have understood him, this wonderful man is a most enjoyable bundle of contradictions. Let him claim as much as he likes that he practises what he preaches, and that there is no contradiction between his theory and practice, but he is contradictory : brimming over almost like a child with naughtiness and sweetness."

Later she wrote to me :

"You are a marvel to me with your combination of sophistication in the good sense and naivete. But as I write the words I feel a thump in my heart, fearing that had I been near you you would have picked up a paper-weight and thrown it at me. Your penchant for naughty expressions is growing ... I pray heartily that your large harem may become larger."

Another young married woman, to whom I had written about my intention to get involved in a literary quarrel, wrote to me :

"You live away from Calcutta and therefore do not realize how true it is that when a man has something to do, he should put aside everything else as false and passing, and go on doing that. Those insolent and envious people are really objects of pity. Do not tire yourself by fighting these shadows. Believe me, here we are not allowed to do what we want to do, do not get opportunities; in fact we do not do anything ourselves and wear ourselves out in trivial quarrels. This is the lot of the Bengali people. We love to think that you have built up and earned your life, and live away from small quarrels."

She wrote again in reply to one of my letters :

"Now, as I am finishing this letter,—it is 11.30 at night, with the sky overcast with piled up clouds, wind laden with rain, and sadness all around—it occurs to my mind that your letters, as well as the attitude I detect behind your letter-writing, talking, reading, and indeed behind all that you do, reveal that life is an all-round art to you, whereas we are cut up, fragmented, broken."

I shall quote two more examples, from letters to me from a young unmarried Bengali girl, who lives in the country. The first extract gives her comment on the Gandhi Centenary.

"You darling," she wrote, "is not moping or pulling a long face over the sorry state of the country; she is busy looking after guests. But the Gandhi Centenary is making her anxious again. Is it possible to keep quiet when one sees officers dressed up in suits and boots getting out of cars to clean drains? I hear that Delhi is having a great show, lots of money is being poured out, speech-making is continuous—and all the streams and tanks are overflowing with tears over the sorrows of the Indian poor; but nothing useful is coming out of it. To be sure Gandhiji could not be expected to live till now, but if he had, he would certainly have had heart-failure at all this ballyhoo, and Godse would not have been needed. There is endless shouting about integration, but Gujarat has proved that the state of affairs remains the same."

The second extract is from a letter (in English) written to me after I had told her of our visit to Kasauli :

"Your letter from Kasauli," she wrote, "was a great surprise to me, because I had not thought of it. I have never gone to a Himalayan hill-station. Your description of the road to Simla excited me. It reminded me of that chapter of Mr. Nehru's *Autobiography*—you may know it—which gives a beautiful picture of Dalhousie, beginning with a quotation :

'This is the way the world ends,  
not with a bang, but a whimper.'

This chapter always flashes into my mind the picture of that panoramic view of the snow-covered mountains—the bliss of solitude. The grandeur of that beauty often renovates me from the trivialities of day-to-day life. The bustles of life are to some extent objective, often full of austerities, but we can get the idea of the coherence of life, of some bond between reality and imagination from it. I had collected the same store of feeling from

Tagore's *Autobiography*, from the description I had from his pen of the same hill-station where in his tender age he went with his father.

"My dearest uncle, please grant a request of mine: show me the path, teach me to feel—

Teach me half the gladness  
That thy brain must know,  
Such harmonious madness  
From my heart would flow,  
The world should listen then,  
As I am listening now!"

The scribblers who think that I am a frustrated man will probably realize from all this what fun my life really is. And if I were capable of noticing these little snipers I would have had any smart that I felt washed away by the dewy affection of my Egerias. All these letters with the exception of one were written in Bengali, and these alone would show that civilized intercourse between men and women is possible in India. Yet we are still crushed by the obsessions and inhibitions. For the sake of watching the effect I at times read out passages from my correspondence with women. Immediately, in the men, there is a reaction which expresses itself in a snigger, or in some peevish remark. This shows that, collectively perhaps, we cannot get out of the refuse heap of the sexual obsessions and inhibitions.

Where then, it will be asked, is the ground for the hope I have expressed? It is to be found in the number of men I have met who have both power and eagerness for conversation, but who do not find openings. Above all, my optimism is based on the latent and partly manifested capacity for conversation in our women. Many will immediately say that I could not have looked to a more unpromising source, for in mixed company our women are even more silent than the men. An English friend told my wife that in company, he noticed, Indian women did not talk much even with one another. This is correct as observation, but only those who know the social background of this taciturnity will interpret it correctly.

Firstly, even among themselves, our young women and girls are expected to be only listeners and spectators before their elders, not participants. This habit has only been extended to mixed parties. Next, our women have no experience of social life of the Western type, and have not acquired any flair for general conversation. Among themselves, they only talk about clothes and adornment. This natural outflow is checked in the company of men. But, invariably, when they get any opportunity, our women show their power of speech : elderly women are as noisy as parrots; the young women as mynahs; and the girls as sparrows. It is only a question of transferring this formidable loquaciousness to social use. I am glad to be able to say that I have found that it is the women themselves who are carrying out the transference.

I meet with great intelligence and pleasantness in conversation even from women from whom I would expect it least, for instance, the plump beauties who look more plump in their tight kamizes and churidar pajamas, who make their languid eyes look more languid by shading the lashes, and who seem to be made only to loll and lounge as odalisques among cushions. Some of them have put the most searching questions to me. I also meet with remarkable powers of conversation in very beautiful women, whom one does not expect to be conversationalists, because their looks work such havoc that they have no need to fall back on any secondary armament.

But I was made to revise my opinion once. A woman who had one of the most nobly beautiful faces came one day to visit me. She was a Punjabi married lady. Except for the nobility of her face I should have expected her to sit still to be admired, and to look askance at me to find out what effect her beauty was producing in me. But she was one of the most fascinatingly responsive and vibrant women I have met. She reacted to every remark with the sensitiveness of a fine violin to the slightest touch of the bow. I have met other women who have remarkable social capacity and capacity for conversation. In fact, I find out women to be more active and wide-ranging than the men in their mental life and erests.

Last of all, I base my hope on the power of correspondence that I see in them, of which I have given examples. A good correspondent is always a good conversationalist, or can be. The most perceptive, intelligent, and agreeable letters that I get are from women, and invariably they are better than any that I get from men. I have one woman among my acquaintances who is equal to the greatest woman letter-writers I have read, and I am a student of Madame de Sevigné. I am sure if I could have social meetings with her she would be a fine talker.

Here then are my grounds of hope. But there should not be over-expectation from them. All that our men and women with social talent can do is to create only an oasis in the desert of our social life. Taken at its widest, I see no hope of rescuing our society from its present domination by the vulgar and the uncultured, and the most vulgar and uncultured are in the highest strata. But why not save ourselves, if we can not save others?

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Concluding Summary*

In discussing our social life I have not been systematic, and so far as I had any ideas or suggestions to offer about it, they have been thrown out incidentally. But we Indians are very fond of systematization and like cut-and-dried opinions, mostly homilistic. I am not given to doing this, but just by way of rounding off my analysis I shall set down some observations which might be taken as the operative part of what I had to say. In a sense these will be commonplaces, but so far as behaviour and action go commonplaces constitute three-quarters of wisdom, and in any case they are the most difficult principles to follow in practice. Men always bring trouble on themselves by not having the strength of mind to act on what should be obvious. Here are my points :

I. Social life properly so-called is communication between like minds. That alone can give us positive pleasure or happiness in the company of other men. But it must not be imagined that social life as we know it in the workaday world can be or will be only that. It can be and will be as much a duty and an infliction as happiness. Not to be prepared for that would be to court disappointment and frustration quite unnecessarily.

II. Let me have done with that part of social life which is infliction. Everybody knows and unusually sensitive minds are emphatic that fellowmen can be very nasty.



For example, Chamfort, a great French aphorist and a very wise man in his way, has said :

"A man must swallow a toad every morning if he wishes to be sure of finding nothing still more disgusting before the day is over."

I agreed with it fully when I read the saying for the first time at about the age of eighteen. I might add parenthetically that it is not harmful to be slightly cynical when young, for at that stage of life idealism can take care of itself, but to be cynical in age is living death.

But to return to the subject. Even Marcus Aurelius, who as an emperor with absolute power could expect everybody to be nice if not obsequious before him, had to put down the following in his *Meditations*, which were addressed to himself :

"Say to yourself in the early morning : I shall meet today inquisitive, ungrateful, violent, treacherous, envious, uncharitable men."

He drew on his Stoic fortitude and wisdom to go through this experience. So anyone who assumes that he will be spared unpleasantness with fellow-men is very unrealistic, and even foolish. Everyone must make allowance for this and in a manner of speaking anneal himself in such a way as not to be embittered or corroded in his nature by all this. Only a little self-discipline is needed to make our daily trials with fellowmen wholly immaterial for our peace of mind.

III. But I have found that as a rule we Indians are unable to make them so. I come upon people, both men and women, who seem to enjoy being ill-treated by others. It is an emotional luxury for them to dwell on and speak about their grievances and wallow in self-pity. Among such people conversation means relating what they suffer at the hands of official superiors or inferiors, relatives near and distant—especially mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, and also servants. No one can be happy if he or she does not resist this perversity.

IV. As to social relations as duty, we should not only admit them, but also make them a source of secondary happiness. Other men have natural claims on us, and if we

answer them that brings us satisfaction by itself, and in addition earns us respect, gratitude, and even affection from those to whom we show consideration. This is a great gain in life.

V. In regard to social relations which are compulsive and not pleasant one should have the moral courage to say 'No' at a certain point or at all events to show by one's attitude that the line of the tolerable has been passed, without caring for what others will say or think. Always to be afraid of the opinion of other people about oneself is a fundamental weakness of the Indian character. Even in respect of social duty it is a mistake to allow compassion to influence our social behaviour too exclusively. In the end it will always be found that intimacy with unequals becomes irksome, and can provoke very unkind reactions. True social life can be had only with those whose character we respect, whose tastes and in some measure temperament we share or sympathize with, and whose personality is attractive to us. I might say that happiness in social life lies in being able to put a stop to our intercourse with others at the point where it appears to reach the limit of its potentiality. This requires moral courage and also great tact. But with practice one learns the technique.

VI. But the fundamental thing to achieve happiness with others is to be more ready to give than to receive. To be unselfish is essential for it. Of course, in going through life we have to pursue self-interest, but it should be kept separate from our social life. I must say that to try to exploit friendship for advancing one's interest is the worst feature of social life among us, and to see this motive cropping up in every social relationship is distressing to me. What I would do is this : I would let every man know when I am trying to make him serve my interest, and when I am treating him as a friend.

VII. There is one last recipe for happiness in social life. Liberty, said Burke, must be limited in order to be possessed. Social life, too, must be limited in order to be enjoyed. No man can be happy who is perpetually dependent on others for his happiness. A man who has not got sources

of happiness within himself, and cannot feel happy in solitude even for long stretches of time, well neither be happy nor make others happy.

## PART II

### FAMILY LIFE

#### Prefatory Explanation

AFTER social life I have to discuss family life, which is an even more important element in a happy existence in this world. I would go further and say that without a sound and satisfactory family life happiness in living is impossible. Yet the sad and stark fact is that for a large majority of people in India it hardly exists, and for the rest it is a bed of thorns and a source of irritation and disappointment. Either it must be redeemed or we must be ready to face the consequences of the disintegration or absence of family life.

Now, family life for me is the life of a human unit consisting of a man, his wife, and his minor sons—specially note the word ‘minor’—I have come to look upon this unit as the true family, not only on account of my admiration for European family life as it was before the present break-up began, but also owing to my own family antecedents.

My father disliked joint families, and since his parents had died before we were born and he had no brothers, he could create a family with his wife and children only. Moreover, he carried on his profession of lawyer in a small town and did not have to live in his village as a landowner, and therefore there was no compulsion on him to live in any other kind of family. What was more important, his was a true family in my sense, not only in its structure, but also in its functioning. As I have written in my autobiography: “Our family grew up as a true family—composed of the father, the mother, and the children—in which each element had its due share of importance and proper status.”

This, I added, was not the norm of the times. But I further said : "My father's originality was that he built up a Bengali Hindu family of a different type. We never called our father brother, nor our mother daughter-in-law. It was a family in which every person knew his place and his function. In fact, the status of my mother was noticed by all our relatives and neighbours. The authority she wielded was considered to be a special characteristic of the little group of human beings comprised by Upendra Narayan Chaudhuri, his wife Sushila Sundari Chaudhurani, and their children."

Having been brought up in such a family, I myself also did not live in a joint family with my brothers after my marriage. In fact, I separated even before marrying. I wanted to live my own life in my own way. I have followed this principle in the case of my sons. My eldest son set up on his own in a separate house as soon as he married, though he worked in Delhi, and though both of us could have saved money by living together. All this background makes me look upon the unit formed by a man, his wife, and his children as the true family. This kind of family will be the main thing to be discussed in this part of the book.

That does not mean, however, that I shall leave out the joint family. On the contrary, it will be the joint family which I shall describe and analyse first; of course, as it was in recent times, and not in any supposed ideal form in a supposed golden age. I am giving precedence to the joint family for two reasons : firstly, because it is still the norm of the family among us, and even more so in theory and unconscious assumption than it is in practice; secondly because, to my thinking, it must be swept aside both in theory and practice if any genuine and satisfactory family life is to be built up in our society. This preliminary task of pulling down the crumbling, ramshackle, and unhealthy building must be accomplished before we can have a new building in its place.

But the obstacles in doing this must not be underrated. There is no more shallow and even silly talk than the chatter one hears in the big cities about the disappearance

of the joint family under the impact of modernization, which really is the impact of Western ideas. This talk comes mostly from a particular class of Hindus who are wholly out of touch with the realities of our social organization. This class is composed of the former Hindu officials who served the British administration and of their descendants, whose natural social and family affiliations were destroyed by the special condition of their service under British rule. In order to keep the Indians whom they employed loyal to themselves and partly also to free them from the corrupting influence of their family and social relationships, the British administrators tore them up from their family and social environment, and the system of transfer virtually made them a new kind of nomads. As a result, there has sprung up an extensive class in India who are wholly self-centred and who acknowledge no social or family obligations. They cannot and do not know what the joint family still is, and under the influence of a borrowed ideology they talk about a social revolution tending to destroy the joint family. They do not know even the basic facts about the Hindu joint family.

The most basic fact is that there was no time in the history of Hindu society in which the joint family was the sole expression of family life, when its sway was undisputed, or when it was *not* breaking up. So far as we know the history of Hindu family life, the joint family has been in existence and breaking up simultaneously all the time. Let me give the instance of my own family. My great-grandfather separated from his joint family, and moved into a new house in the eighteenth century, and that house in my time was called the New House, though two hundred years old, to distinguish it from the ancestral house, which began to be called the Old House, as it was also called in my time. This was happening all over Bengal or for that matter all over India. At a certain point the joint family was invariably throwing out branches which cut themselves from the original tree.

This followed no fixed law in regard to method or time. Sometimes a son would leave his father's house when quite young and newly married, at other times he would

do so at a later age; and even when one son left, the other sons would be living with their parents. The separation depended on the character of the young man or of his young wife. In some cases, both had considerable independence of mind and will, in others either the will of a strong young man or an equally strong young woman prevailed. Of course, when the separation took place under the influence of the wife, she was always regarded as the breaker of honourable homes. But the separation was a continuous process, like the weathering of rocks, or the separation of water courses. Never did the joint family have any standard form nor did it have an uninterrupted existence.

It would surprise many modern Hindus to learn that the joint family is not treated as the standard form of family in the most authoritative Dharma Sastras, e.g., the Manu Samhita. In describing the Hindu *Varnashrama Dharma*, the Sastras do not refer to the joint family but to the smaller family as the proper unit of the *Grihasthashrama*. Indeed, in these books the hold of the patriarchal family is not indicated at all. The sons as very young men leave for the *Guru Griha*, and they live with the Guru as a Brahmachari in a social unit existing solely for study and devotions. Then a young man becomes a *Snataka*, takes a wife, and sets up as a *Grihastha*, becoming *Sagnika*, a man possessed of his own hearth, that being the symbol of true family and home life among the ancient Hindus as among the ancient Romans. The routine of the daily home life is surprisingly similar in both cases.

Furthermore, the Manu Samhita expressly says that a younger brother who separates from an elder brother does a meritorious thing. Both courses are permissible, but separation is better. Let me quote the exact injunction: "If the eldest brother behaves as an eldest brother he must be treated like a mother and like a father; but if he behaves in a manner unworthy of an eldest brother, he should yet be honoured like a kinsman. Either let them thus live together or apart, if each desires spiritual merit; by living separately spiritual merit increases, and therefore separation is meritorious." (M.S.—Ch. 17, V. 23) The

significance of this is explained by the great commentators Medhatithi and Kulluka Bhatta, who point out that if a brother separates he has to set up another hearth, kindle the sacred fire, and thus he becomes an independent *Agni-hotri*, and performer of the *Pancha-suna* or five sacrifices, and the like. Thus he gains more spiritual merit, and does not remain a mere beneficiary of his brother's spiritual merit.

This should show that neither the theoretical nor the practical breaking up of the joint family is a new thing : far less is its break-up the achievement of the Anglicized Hindus of our times. The two forms of the family have always existed side by side, they do so still, and perhaps they will continue to do so unless one is destroyed consciously. So, I have to discuss the joint family as a good or a bad thing in our family life. My bias is known, if indeed it can be called a bias. Only the demonstration has to be given.



## CHAPTER ONE

### *The Joint Family*

What is the joint family in its essential features? Let me begin by quoting my description of it in my autobiography. After saying that it was more like a tribal camp than a family, I went to say : "In these joint homes the family relations inevitably got mixed up. The father, the son, the son-in-law, the mother, the daughter, the daughter-in-law were all having children at the same time. The uncles, the aunts, and the cousins were doing the same thing, and the children called the elders and one another whatever they liked. The fathers were called brother, the grandfathers and brothers father, mothers daughter-in-law, grandmothers mother, uncles father, nephews brother, till there was indescribable confusion in the idea of blood relationship and nobody could claim any exclusive right in a child."

After this I also commented : "I am doubtful whether Plato would have advocated the removal of children from the care of their parents and the extirpation of parental interest in the child if he had seen our system at work and in its results. We went very far towards not only his system but also the modern system of public crèches. We almost succeeded in eliminating the influence of the mother and the father, in abolishing parental exclusiveness, and throwing the child on the lap of the community and its Nomos."

That is its shape and spirit still. At its best the joint

family is a co-operative society based on the blood-tie, and a smaller and more closely knit replica of the village community. I have no doubt that its origin is to be found in the primitive patriarchal family, which was both a genetic and an economic organization. This kind of family was only a more natural and yet smaller form of the tribe, or perhaps the tribe was the extension of this type of family. So, the persistence of the type was due to two emotional impulses : love of power of the patriarchs and the desire in the members of the family for economic security. In practice the Hindu joint family provided social and unemployment insurance in a special form. It also helped the racial preservation of a particular human group by enabling its young men to marry early, even when they did not possess economic independence. In fact, early marriage and the joint family are closely related.

But in its contemporary form the spirit of the joint family has changed to such an extent that the residual security which it is still able to offer is hardly a counterpoise to the evils it is creating. The major evils are, of course, the destruction of individuality and the spirit of self-help, and the erosion of good feeling among the members of a large family. The maintenance of good feeling and sympathy among the members of a joint family was certainly its best feature when it worked properly. It is this very feature which has most clearly been destroyed by the joint family as it exists today. Thus one may say that it is destroying its own highest purpose.

Let me give three examples of its extreme degradation and repulsive degeneration. These are from my own knowledge and experience. When I was living in Calcutta there was a large house just across the courtyard, which was rented by a Bengali business man—a wholesale dealer in potatoes, to be exact. As it happened, a younger brother, either unemployed or with an insufficient income, was living with him with his young wife and children. The house was so near that I had to be the unwilling eavesdropper to all the squabbling between the sisters-in-law. The evenings were specially set apart for their back-talk, probably because the menfolk were out at the time. One day

I heard an altercation which was louder and more acrimonious than usual, and in which the elder sister-in-law was obviously getting the better of the quarrel. Then the younger brother, whose voice I had never heard before, intervened to save his wife and said : "What is all this tall talking. After all, what are you? You 'eat' only by selling potatoes."

"What", shrieked the sister-in-law, "we 'eat' by selling potatoes! Let him come home today, and we shall see who eats what." After that there was no rejoinder.

The master of the house always came home late to a very late dinner, and at about half-past ten I heard him washing and coughing, and then he began to mount the stairs, making a series of loud taps with his wooden clogs. As soon as he had reached the upper landing, there arose a wail from the bedroom at the end of the verandah, broken by wild sobs : "Oh, oh, oh! They say that we 'eat' by selling potatoes." The wives in the joint families always set the husband-dog on their rivals when the animal is most tired and hungry, and therefore as keen as mustard. This works. In this case too, I heard the man give a roar and shout : "What! We 'eat' by selling potatoes! Why do the *salas* 'eat' the money from potatoes?" Fortunately, there was no answer from the other side, which would certainly have resulted in blows. But the next morning I saw a hackney carriage standing at the door, the luggage of the younger brother being put on it, and he with his wife and children getting into it and driving away.

The next incident concerned a doctor, a retired captain of the I.M.S., who was unmarried and lived with his father, along with a large number of dependents. This had come in the way of his marrying. Now, unmarried men, when they are getting on to the old bachelor stage of life, are, like *mast* elephants, if they are not of loose character, and the father too was old and very cantankerous. So I heard the two quarrelling very often. One day it went further. After the normal barking and counter-barking, the son suddenly got up, picked up a bamboo pole, and rushed on his father shouting "I'll kill the *sala* today. The *sala* has ruined my life." The father yapped back : "Come on

*sala*, kill your *sala* of a father." Then all the other men and women intervened and separated the two fighting dogs. Certainly, I also behaved very improperly by watching the scene from my window, but as you must know one never learns what Hindu society really is unless one can watch its behind the scenes. But I was still green, for I expected the father and son to separate the next day. But nothing happened. Everything was as usual the next morning, and every morning afterwards, whatever the evenings might be. The tradition of Hindu *pitri-bhakti* is such that the sun never rises on a son's anger towards this father.

My third example is about an elder brother, who was "England-returned" and a 'Bar-at-law' of Calcutta High Court, and his younger brother who did nothing, was a dilettante, and lived on whatever share he had on the ancestral property. This, the elder brother did not like, and he went about it in a very cunning way. The younger brother had been bequeathed certain family heirlooms like medals and coins, all of gold and of considerable value, on account of his taste for these things, and the elder brother set about to deprive him of all this. He defaulted in paying the municipal tax, and under the rules, it could be recovered jointly and severally from all the members of the joint family or any. The elder brother went to the collecting office of the Corporation, bribed the bailiffs, and got them to come and attach the gold medals and coins of the younger brother. When these were taken away to the treasury of the Corporation, the young man came frantically to a friend of mine who was an official there, and through his influence got the things released, after paying the whole tax from his share.

Anyone who is familiar with the Hindu joint family also knows that such things are as common in it as the normal uneventful living. The two states alternate. Life in it is a microcosm of the pattern of our general collective life. There are no people who are more law-abiding, non-violent, and even given to submitting to the worst oppression and who yet are so prone to run amuck at a sudden provocation. Then they will burn, loot, and kill until the fit is off. It is this which is also the pattern of living in

a joint family. What the members of the joint family can say or do to one another can never be foretold. Anything may happen from abuse to killing. Don't forget that cotton, which is itself inert cellulose, is very inflammable..、 へ、

As I have written in *The Continent of Circe* :

"Even after such abnormal relations have become permanent, the relatives live together, always treading on smouldering volcanoes, which erupt from time to time in smoke, fire, and brimstone. In the course of the quarrels all reticence and reserve is thrown to the winds, and the grossest abuse and even blows are exchanged.

"The weak are beaten, equals hurt one another, until the other members of the family and at times even the neighbours separate the parties. Otherwise kind, decent, honourable, and educated men do things which remain in the mind like unwashable stains of shame, and are felt as unhealed festering sores. All, men as well as women, show a perverse genius in discovering words which will wound most." Indeed, the verbal cruelty shown in family quarrels has to be heard to be believed.

Even without such atrocious examples, the joint family remains the least satisfactory form of family life. The maladjustments in it range from mere friction to rancorous rivalries, and no sensitive person can live in them without feeling either tortured or smothered in spirit. The moods may be anything from a dull sensation of meaninglessness to positive pain. And the worst of it is that it is only the strongest and the most assertive characters, who are not at all common in our society, who can revolt and break away; the others go on enduring until they lose all self-respect, or in any case individuality.

But before I go on to consider the specific ills created or perpetuated by the joint family, and they are many and very harmful, I feel I must describe the different forms of the joint family which are to be met with today, for now, as in the past, it takes a number of quite distinct forms, with many intermediate ones which shade off into one another. I shall take note of the clearly distinguishable three.

I. The largest joint family is the one in which three generations live together, and in which the grandfather, normally

with no brothers living with him, is the patriarch or head of the family. Below him are the grown-up and married sons, and next to them the grandchildren, married or unmarried. In such families the cooking and meals are usually in common.

II. The second type is formed by grown-up and married brothers who live together with their children in the same house, as a rule the paternal or ancestral house, but may or may not take their meals in common. A joint family with undivided property may be divided in respect of meals, that is, it may be, as described in Sanskrit, *ekanna* or *prithaganna*.

III. The third distinct type of joint family is the smallest and is the one in which the parents live with their young married sons, and the small children of the latter.

Life as lived in these different types of the joint family cannot be understood without examining the economic basis of the family in general and also its domicile. The largest and the most cohesive joint families are those which are dependent for their income on hereditary landed property or business, and which have remained either in the same village or the same city for generations. In other words, the joint family *par excellence* is the family of the old Hindu Zamindar or Seth. The other two types are only the derivatives of the original large joint family.

The derivation in its turn would not be understood unless one remembers one extremely significant fact that the joint family has never split up in obedience to a principle, but only under the pressure of circumstances or internal unwieldiness. That is to say, the principle of the joint family has never been challenged, nor superseded. Its break-up has been simply empiric or pragmatic, without any impact on the theoretical concept of the Hindu family. To use a metaphor, its division has been like the vegetative propagation of cacti or bulbous plants. That is why the more it breaks, the more does it survive.

Certainly, during the last thirty years or so there has been a greater appearance of break-up of the joint family than was seen in the previous one hundred years even under the impact of Western ideas of individuality and personal

development. And, absolutely, there are today more families of the type I consider to be the true family, i.e., a family consisting of a man, his wife, and his children, than existed ever before. But this is due almost wholly to the change in the economic status of the middle-class. Instead of land, business, and the professions, it is now the salaried jobs which are providing incomes for the members of this class in ever-increasing measure, and these jobs under the bureaucracy, technocracy, and plutocracy, which constitute the trinitarian dominant order of contemporary India, are entailing migration from place to place. The bearing of this economic change on the joint family should be obvious. Landed property keeps a family anchored to the land it owns, and land is immovable. Profession and business, too, when once the place has been chosen, in cases where a migration from the ancestral home was originally required, does not permit or need another migration except in very exceptional circumstances. But salaried jobs in the present stage of development of employment in India do call for changes of residence, in many cases, many such.

The qualification 'present stage' should be noted. When the shift from landed property, business, and professions to salaried employment was not so pronounced and rapid as it is now, the governmental and mercantile offices in a big city could always offer such employment, though not in the highest grades, in sufficient numbers to the permanent inhabitants of a particular city, making movement in search of employment very largely unnecessary. For instance, in Calcutta under British rule up to about 1920, salaried posts in the Bengal Government, Calcutta Corporation, and the mercantile offices were virtually reserved for the hereditary residents of the city, and it was very difficult for any person from, say, East Bengal to get into any of these offices. In these conditions of employment the joint family was not disturbed by the new economic development in the big cities.

In one sense, it was even perpetuated, because the heads of joint families could always secure employment for their sons and nephews in their own offices. The British employers knew this, but did not object. On the other hand,

they even favoured this nepotism, for they could then have guarantors for the new entrants and also get them on lower salaries, since the young men who lived with their parents or uncles could accept salaries which could not keep anyone who had to set up on his own. Thus salaried employment, too, did not have a disruptive impact on the joint family as it existed among the permanent residents of a city.

But the great economic shift towards salaried jobs has been suddenly and very powerfully accelerated by a number of trends: social, economic, and cultural decay of the villages; attack on landowning by the middle and upper classes who did not actually cultivate the land, which is making it almost impossible for these classes to live on landed property; lack of capital among the middle-class; overcrowding in independent professions like law and medicine,

Apart from all this, there has been a remarkable change of attitude towards salaried employment. Formerly, this was looked upon as derogatory, as *ghulami* of some sort. But the dominant minority of independent India, who are imposing their outlook and values on rest of the population, is now composed of the members of the landless and capital-less intelligentsia, who during British rule were dependent on salaries for subsistence, i.e.—were *ghulams*, and often *ghulams* for three generations. As a result, the whole outlook of the middle-class has become desk-oriented, so to speak; and their sole ambition is to climb up a ladder of salary. This in itself has created its Parkinson's Law, and the example of the middle-class is now being followed by peasants, artisans, as also by those people who performed social service, like washerman barbers, etc.—they are all turning to salaried employment as peons or chaprassies. Another driving force behind this shift is the desire of the Indian people to have wages without relation to work or production, which can only be satisfied at a desk. Another powerful force behind it is the popular socialistic ideology which is making both government and economic organizations more and more bureaucratic.

So, salaried employment has not only become a necessity,



but it has also gained social respectability. It is exercising an irresistible lure on the middle-class, and it is this movement which is responsible for the relatively more extensive break-up of the joint family that has been seen in recent times. Young men are taking up jobs in distant places and away from their parental homes both from necessity and inclination. So, when they marry, they take their wives with them and create the unitary family. This, however, is a submission to external conditions, not the creation of a new type of family. The change is one of degree, not of kind.

The real proof of any break-up of the joint family in order to bring into existence a unitary family, is to be sought in this : whether a son who works in the city in which his parents live sets up on his own after marriage. This is definitely not the rule. In such cases it will be found that a majority live with their parents, and there is no disturbance of joint living, except to the extent which was always seen in Hindu society. In addition to this, certain other facts are also to be noted which indicate that even when a unitary family exists in fact and *ad hoc*, the emotional and theoretical attachment to the joint family survives in spite of the forced separation of the sons from their parents.

For one thing, the mothers leave their aged and therefore stale husbands to stay by turns with their sons in different cities, so that they might continue the role of the reigning mother-in-law, and if they are widows they do the same thing but only play the role of the serving mother-in-law. Thus there is created, alongside of the permanent joint family in the original place of residence, a joint family in camp, to employ the vocabulary of peregrinating government servants. The sons, too, send away their wives and children from time to time for long visits to the parents, often for child-birth or treatment, so that they might have occasional respites from the wife's supervision, and opportunities for freer living. Thus, even when the joint family is broken up through economic necessity, it continues to receive a token loyalty from all concerned. As I cannot emphasize enough, it is never rejected in principle.

I am setting down all this to show that the break-up of the joint family about which we hear so much in these days is not as real as it is thought or declared to be. The norm of the Hindu family is still the joint family. The unitary family has come into being, but it is not universal, nor has it been wholly legitimized. It might be said that its status in modern Hindu society is analogous to that of the so-called love-marriage in it. Therefore I have to discuss the harmful effect on true family life of the fully traditional or modified joint family. Unfortunately, the evils are many.

Let me begin with the largest and the most comprehensive type of joint family. These never were, and so far as they survive never are, families in the strictest sense of the word, that is to say, a group formed by parents and children constituting the fundamental social unit in all civilized societies. Their real structure and functioning remain those of a collective group which might be called a small clan living together. Its analogy is the *familia* of Roman law, which was subject to the absolute authority of the *paterfamilias*. Husband, wife, and children did not necessarily constitute an independent family among the Romans. A family in the legal sense was the whole group of persons, related by blood or not, who were subject to the authority of the head of the family, which was at first defined as *manus* and later as *jus*.

The position of the titular father, who was, of course, the actual father of many members of the family, is described very picturesquely by Gibbon. "The law of nature," he writes, "instructs most animals to cherish and educate their infant progeny. The law of reason inculcates to the human species the returns of filial piety. But the exclusive, absolute, and perpetual dominion of the father over his children is peculiar to the Roman jurisprudence." He goes on to add : "In the forum, the senate, or the camp, the adult son of a Roman citizen enjoyed the public and private rights of a *person* : in his father's house he was a mere *thing* : confounded by the laws with movables, the cattle, and the slaves, whom the capricious master might alienate or destroy without being responsible to any earthly tribunal."

Gibbon amplifies the position still further : "Neither age, nor rank, nor the consular office, nor the honours of a triumph, could exempt the most illustrious citizen from the bonds of filial subjection : his own descendants were included in the family of the common ancestor; and the claims of adoption were not less sacred or less rigorous than those of nature. Without fear, though not without danger of abuse, the Roman legislators had reposed an unbounded confidence in the sentiments of paternal love; and the oppression was tempered by the assurance that each generation must succeed in its turn to the awful dignity of parent and master."

The only exception was made when the son was performing a public duty by virtue of his office, and Livy illustrates this with a vivid anecdote. During the second Punic war Quintus Fabius junior as Consul was commanding a Roman army, and one day his father, who officially was his lieutenant, rode into his camp. No one could ride up to a Consul on horseback, but as old Fabius rode on, eleven of the twelve lictors preceding his son remained silent and inactive out of respect for the father. But the junior Fabius himself ordered the twelfth lictor to do his duty, and the man made the father dismount. Old Fabius jumped down from his horse and said to his son : "I wanted to find out, my son, whether you sufficiently realized that you are Consul." That rather reminds one of M.G. Ranade, who as judge always took his seat in the court-room before the arrival of his father who was his peshkar, so that the latter might not have to stand up when he entered.

The remarkable similarity between the customs and manners of the ancient Romans and those of ancient Hindus has always struck me whenever I have been able to make any comparative study of their institutions. There is certainly a common Indo-European element in them. It is curious that the Dharma Sastras should not sanction the legal authority of the father or patriarch in the same way as Roman law. But what it left unsanctioned in law was more than made up by moral injunction, in which submission to the father's will was made one of the supreme duties. There is no doubt that the Hindu tradition of *pitri-bhakti*,

as summed up in the following sloka:

*Pita svargah, pita dharmah, pitahi paramantapah;  
Pitari pritimapanne priyante sarva-devatah:*

was founded on a conception of the father's position similar to the Roman father's. Formalities of outward respect were no less scrupulously observed. Young Rabindranath Tagore was sent away by his father because he had gone to him barebodied, and he was asked to come again properly dressed. In the Tagore family the father could not be addressed as simple father, but only as *Baba Mashay*, i.e. 'Sir Father'. When young, I too was told and taught that when my father spoke to me I was not to look him in the face but remain standing with bowed head, contemplating his feet. A son who raised his face before his father was universally condemned as an ill-bred and insolent young man. I did indeed look my father in the face when we talked with each other. But that was because my father had completely rejected the code of behaviour of the patriarchal family.

But this parental authority completely destroyed the individuality of the sons, except for sowing his wild oats secretly. In regard to his ideals and convictions he was rendered wholly impotent. He could have no voice in his education, marriage, and profession. All these were chosen for him by his father, and the tradition of submission remains as strong as ever. All the square pegs in round holes that are found in the vocations and professions in India today are the handiwork of the authoritarian fathers. Thus the sons never develop personality as individuals, and remain a type, perpetuated from generation to generation.

If anybody thinks that the son of a Hindu high official would become an individual because his father is now a secretary instead of being a land-owner, he would be dreadfully mistaken. He would invariably be of the type to which his father belongs. Go to any college and you will recognize every young man as the son of his father, whether the latter is a secretary, a business man, a clerk, or a shop-keeper. You will be able even to distinguish the

young man whose father has a car, from one whose father has none. They breed true to type like peas.

One day I was rather brash about this. An I.C.S. official who had met me many years ago recognized me, while I did not recognize him. So he said in joke: "You see, Mr. Chaudhuri, I have a better memory than you." I replied without humour: "But I am so easily recognizable. On the other hand, all high officials are like one another." This remarkable uniformity even in external appearance is true of all persons brought up in the Hindu tradition, or for that matter even in the Anglicized Hindu tradition. They do not acquire individual physiognomy.

It follows from this that in a joint family any departure from the established pattern and ideals of life is impossible. As I have already said, a certain length of rope is allowed to the young men for sowing wild oats, because without this flexibility in respect of vicious impulses the family would break. But no latitude is permitted in regard to opinions and convictions which concern values. Thus, no member of a joint family can acquire new moral, religious, or even intellectual ideas as long as he remains in the family. All that he can do in such matters is to hold a set of utterly theoretical views in private without ever trying to give effect to them in his conduct. In the last century those Bengalis who adopted the monotheistic creed of the Brahmo movement had to leave the parental home, and were repudiated by all their orthodox relatives. This applied even to going abroad across the seas. Down to my young days the Bengalis who went to England for education were cast out from their families, and they formed a community of their own in respect of eating and marriage. The only concession that was made was to make them go through an expiation ceremony, which included, among other rites, eating cow dung and drinking cow's urine, declaring falsely that he had not eaten any forbidden food, and shaving the head.

When any unorthodox tendency was discovered in a young member of a joint family every effort was made to reclaim him, and he could be reclaimed even by main force. An uncle of mine who had gone to Dacca for education

showed signs of leaning towards Brahmo religious opinions. As soon as news of his delinquency reached the family in the village, the elders went and brought him back. The sudden visit of a father or uncle to a young man in a boarding house or lodgings in Calcutta or any other city was always the result of some information against him in connexion with an unorthodox marriage or unorthodox religious opinions. As it happened, when my uncle was brought back from Dacca, it was the season of the Durga Puja, and the elders gave him a bath with the blood of the sacrificed buffalo and cured him for ever of his Brahmoism. In my young days he always lead the chorus when we sang the praise of Durga and Kali.

I have another story, told by Sir Walter Lawrence, of the anger of a Rajput Chief when his adopted son, a worthless fellow, was asked to take up study and visit his subjects in a carriage, by the British Resident with a view to reforming him. The father listened for a while. Then his patience was gone, and, as Sir Walter relates, "the storm broke. The old Chief boomed out a litany of contempt and malediction, of which the refrain ran:

"Kitab Parh=Read books  
Buggi men baith=Sit in a buggy"

It must not be imagined that this sort of coercion is no longer seen. Let any young man who belongs to a family with a traditional or fixed pattern of life try to go over to a kind of life which is not that of his parents, and he will see whether it exists or not. The anger of the father and wails of the mother will bring him to heel very quickly. It is the same even in those families which call themselves modern. The principle of coercion has not changed. What has changed is only the pattern in the mould, the mould itself persists.

The truth of the matter is that throughout the ages the joint family has been the lowest unit of regimentation in a society which was authoritarian and had to be so. The Hindu or Aryan-Brahmanic society and culture were the creation of a conquering people who had to maintain both in a hostile geographical and human environment.

It could not survive in India without a rigid disciplining of its members. The disciplining continues, though the highest values have long since disappeared.

The second injury that the joint family has inflicted on Hindu society is the erosion and undermining of all spirit of adventure and self-help. Young men born in joint family were formerly assured of a comfortable life within the framework of the family's standard of living without working, and even in these days he can depend on a sort of unemployment dole when he is in a joint family. Therefore he does not show great energy in having an adequate income of his own. The spirit of adventure based on ambition is even rarer. Observing the effect of the joint family on adventurousness, I sometimes think whether the right of primogeniture which obtains in England and on account of which the younger sons have no right to parental property, is not a better principle than the rights of inheritance which Hindu law, and more especially the Mitakshara system, gives in India. It has been said that the British empire was founded by the younger sons, who went out to seek fortune in foreign countries because there were none for him at home. One immediately thinks of Cecil Rhodes, who was the fourth son an English clergyman, and left England at the age of seventeen to try his fortune in South Africa.

This lack of the spirit of adventure is seen even in marriages, that is to say, in marriages conceived of as financial ventures. Both in England and France the poorer young sons married outside their class for money. The young nobles often married the daughters of commercial or bourgeois families. A very snobbish French Countess had married her son into a bourgeois family for money, and when asked about it by her noble relations, she replied calmly: "It is sometimes necessary to manure even the best fields." If such marriages did not do much for love, at all events they helped what nowadays is called social mobility, that is to say, the movement of individuals from class to class, either to rise or to fall, which prevented the classes from becoming ossified. The joint family, in contrast, favours this ossification, and in the end it becomes sterile

in its social outlook, and sometimes even physiologically. The in-breeding lowers physical and mental efficiency.

In its internal operation, too, the joint family is very harmful. In its personal relations between the members can hardly be called personal, because they tend to get sorted out according to sex, age, and status. In these families men and women constitute two different worlds with wholly different values, and a family atmosphere which is created by the mingling of the different colours of life peculiar to each sex, and which, as a result of this mingling, acquires an overall colour utterly different from that of any family in which the male and female members live segregated lives, is never brought into existence. Anyone who wants to get a feeling of the difference should consider whether it will be the same thing to him or her if they are received by the host or the hostess alone instead of by both when they are visiting socially.

Moreover, when the two sexes are brought together in these families, their relations hardly ever become intimate. Brothers and sisters, after they have reached a certain age, keep a formal distance between one another in their external behaviour. The sisters-in-law (*Bhabis* in Hindi and *Baudidis* in Bengali) can be more open and easy in their meetings with the younger brothers-in-law, but a line is drawn beyond which neither friendliness, nor pleasantry, nor flirtation is permissible. Mothers and sons come more often in contact. However, these meetings, when the mother retains authority either through her living husband or property of her own, are more like visits to the family deity when disinterested, and like visits to the family solicitor when business is involved, for it is the mother who serves as the intermediary between the father and the son in all matters on which there has to be consultations between the two. Dependent mothers hardly ever see their sons, who keep up only the bare appearance of a relationship called for by decency. I shall have something to say presently about the relations between husbands and wives in such families.

Again, within each sex, age is the next segregating factor. Among the males there is no communication except of a very formal kind between those who differ perceptibly



in age. The elders, the married men upto forty, the unmarried young men, and the boys form distinct groups. The boys behave among themselves exactly as pack animals do towards one another. They might fight one another, but they will not also live without one another. The elders exhibit the opposite behaviour. They are solitary and morose, and hardly ever talk much even among themselves, though at times they do sit gravely together in silence. The only really friendly and companionable persons in such families are the unmarried young men. The married young men form a transitional type, on the way to moroseness but not wholly devoid of sociability. Thus it is the unmarried young men in a joint family who show the real family spirit. They are expansive, even towards brothers when they are near to one another in age, and, of course, towards the cousins, with whom often they are really intimate. But the family life of these young men is more like the club life of chums.

In contrast, there is much more intercommunication between the women, even though might differ in age. The older women have no inhibition in talking freely before young and unmarried girls, and the latter grow wise in the ways of the world by listening to this gossip. The older women even tell improper stories without minding the young girls, though elderly men will never do so before young men who are related to them. In any case, there is scolding, protesting, ragging; and an unceasing practice in loquacity is always going on in the inner house, which serves the young girls well after marriage.

The third factor in segregation is status. The dependents, whether men or women, can never mix freely with those who have a right to the family's income. But in old days they were never ill-treated. In the typical joint families of the larger type provision of board and lodging to needy relatives, both men and women, was recognized universally as a duty, and therefore neither the master nor the mistress minded their presence, though, on the other hand, they did not take positive note of their existence. The dependents, on their part, never expected that. They were glad that they were neither starving nor naked, and were having

a respite from the curse of having to eat bread with the sweat of their brow. Indeed, they themselves would have thought in quite unreasonable to be hurt at being ignored. Positive humiliation of dependents is a new thing in joint families. It has come into existence recently.

On account of the various principles of segregation the houses in which these large families were accommodated had many *mahals*, even up to three for the *sadar* or outer house, and three for the zenana or the inner house, with gardens and private tanks behind. I am, of course, speaking here of well-to-do Bengali landed families. To give more details, the three *mahals* of the zenana were assigned respectively to the master's wife and children, to the dependents, and to the women servants. Each of these was built and furnished in accordance with the status of those who lived in them. There is a very interesting description of the *mahal* of the dependent women in one Bankim Chandra Chatterji's novels, and I should like to quote it.

"The old zenana," he writes, "was ill-built, consisting of low, small, and dingy rooms. It was as noisy day and night with its numerous inmates of women relatives— aunts and cousins from the mother's and the father's side, widowed aunts and married nieces, cousins' wives and cousins' daughters, as a banyan tree with its crows. And it boomed like the sea with shouting, laughter, quarrels, argument, gossip, slander, with the horse-play of the boys and blubbering of the girls, and with cries of 'Bring water', 'Give me my sari', 'Is rice cooked?' My child has not had anything to eat', 'Where is *dahi*, and so on."

I may say that in my ancestral home in the village I saw something of this. This life had no inhumanity in it, to be sure, but it was also wholly unhuman. So these families naturally had their animal extension in the stray cats and dogs which adopted it just as the human relatives had done. Nobody minded them either. The only dependents on whom some personal attention was given were the birds kept as pets, which were both parrots and mynahs, but not the pigeons—they were like the human dependents.

This kind of communal living is not family life, and there is in addition something which is even more opposed

to true family life as I conceive it, in the large joint family. That is the kind of married life it compels its members to have. This type of family puts serious obstacles in the way of developing intimate personal relations of love, affection, and companionship between husband and wife. Most definitely, the husband-wife relationship in it did not and does not conform to the concept embodied in the famous sloka:

*Grihini, sachivah, sakhi, mithah  
Priya-shishya lalite kala-vidhau ...*”

which was the highest idea of the man-wife relationship among the ancient Hindus.

Marriage in the large joint families was and remains, with exceptions which are found in any set of practices normal to a social institution, a relationship for procreation from the socio-biological point of view, and from the personal point of view one for legitimized physical satisfaction for both the man and the woman. Of course, this does not mean that a passionnal overtone on the physical relationship did not enter into the relationship, but that was hardly more developed than the psychic overtones that are seen in the mating of beasts and birds. Both exhibit behaviour which may be interpreted as rudimentary affection and tenderness in human terms. The emotional embroideries on the sexual relationship of young couples in large joint families were at their best are only a more developed and continuous form of animal courtship. On the other hand, there intruded into this relationship a sordid aspect which is not found in natural sexual behaviour of birds and beasts. It arose from the assumption which most young women had, that they were entitled to material consideration in the shape of clothes and jewellery for providing physical satisfaction to their husbands, as if the satisfaction was wholly one-sided. This amounted to adding an economic touch to the married relationship, which morals have not sanctioned within marriage, though that is considered fair outside wedlock, where sexual satisfaction is a commercial commodity.

But the human touch which is considered most essential

in marriage, that is to say, the merging of the personality of husband and wife in love and companionship, was virtually absent. Its indispensable instrument, conversation, was made impossible during the day, and if there was opportunity at night that was hardly made use of, because there were more elemental exchanges to attend to. Nowadays young couples in the cities try to have intimate conversation in a novel way. When I take my morning walks I see a fair number young couples trying to make their married life something more than sleeping in a common bed. Knowing what their houses in the old city are like, I have felt glad that the young women are at least getting fresh air, and the conversation, too, from the movement of the lips seems to be fresh. So far as mutual affection can be exhibited in public, they seem to be very much in love. But the effect of this decorous love-making is often spoilt for on-lookers by the brushing of teeth by both with neem twigs. Altogether, in the large joint families, young couples are never allowed to develop all the potentialities of married life.

The elderly and aged couples certainly have wider personal contacts on many matters. But these are for the most part consultations on running the family and on its problems, and are thus nothing more than business matters. As seen by outsiders, the elderly husbands and wives seem hardly to take notice of each other. I wonder if old Hindu couples in a joint, or for that matter any family ever sit together of an evening and say :

“John Anderson my jo, John,  
We clamb the hill thegither,  
And money a canty day, John,  
We’ve had wi’ ane anither :  
Now we maun totter down, John,  
But hand in hand we’ll go,  
And sleep thegither at the foot,  
John Anderson my jo.”

A mellow married life in which all the colours of love from blazing red and gold of young days to pearly pink and grey of late life mingle, is as much a matter of wise culti-

vation as the ripe fruit which evolves from the flower-bud. It does not come of itself. But the joint family makes even the cultivation difficult.

The elderly women always have their affection, whose supply is in any case limited, diverted from the husband to the grand-children. But if anyone imagines that the infatuation these women show for their grand-children is love he would be mistaken. It is intense selfishness, and an egoistic impulse to appropriate the children to herself. This leads me to another serious defect in the large joint families, which is the absence of the natural parental relationship between the young fathers and mothers and their children.

The children are taken away from their mothers by the grandmothers, who apart from feeding hardly ever show any willingness to surrender even the babies to their daughters-in-law. The assumption in these families is that the young children belong to the family, and not to parents, and this is sought to be justified on the ground that the young mothers know nothing of bringing up children. So, even if the young mother in a joint family should be educated and know much more about bringing up children than her mother-in-law, the old woman will interfere with feeding and every other care of the child, and impose practices which are completely primitive.

The young father on his part cannot take notice of his children if he cares to have any reputation for modesty and decorous behaviour. In any case, he cannot influence the system of values of his children, nor shape their character. This would never be tolerated. Both fathers and mothers acquire authority over their children only when the grandparents are dead, but at that stage their authority can no longer be exerted to form character or personality.

Let me consider the spirit of the large joint families in regard to money and property. On this matter I would set down the opinion quite deliberately that these families were seen at their best as an economic institution, since basically they were that, though organized round the genetic tie. One might call them joint-stock companies, or co-operative societies, or partnerships in business brought

into existence by the blood relationship. Thus, both socially and economically, the large joint family was most satisfactory and efficient when the property or business was held in common and managed by the head of the family with firmness. It offered genuine security when the income of the family was adequate, and was an insurance against destitution even on an insufficient income. However, it was based on a conception of property rights which was a compromise between an extremely individualistic aspiration to property and acquiescence in collectivism. It could never work if the members of the family were acquisitive individually.

Therefore in these families troubles at once arose if a member wanted to use his share of the income of the family according to his own liking, or if he thought the family's income to be insufficient and took to personal earning by taking up a profession or salaried job. Then the resulting inequality of income created all sorts of maladjustments, and the joint family fell between two stools, that is to say, it lost the harmony and contentment which had come from common living, without acquiring the individual enterprise of a unitary family. This is what is happening to the large joint family now. The spirit of individuality has been growing up in India during the last one hundred years or so, and it is much stronger now than it was ever before. The unwillingness to make a definite choice between the two types of family is therefore bringing into existence all sorts of hybrids of the joint family, each one of which is more unsatisfactory than the old large joint family.

The spirit in which the old large joint family was run depended wholly on the personality of the head of the family and of his wife. If the two were of strong character, wise, and unselfish, the unavoidable frictions between its members, and more especially the women, were kept within reasonable bounds. That is to say, the clashes took place on the back stage, like the quarrels of children in a family. A certain latitude had to be given to the expression of rivalries, jealousies, and maladjustments, because without this elasticity every member of the family would feel cruelly suppressed and tyrannized over. But this was only a safety

valve. As soon as certain limits were passed, the master and the mistress put their foot down, or rather they did not even have to do so, for the threat of being appealed to was often enough to end the quarrels. A young woman who had got the worst of a quarrel could always say that she was going to the Mistress, and that would at once make the other offer amends.

But when the family had a weak master and mistress it showed the worst aspect of the joint family. Those who have not seen such families can get a very close idea of what they were like by looking at the ministries in India based on the party system, especially the ministries which call themselves United Fronts. Contemporary party politics in India is derived from the tradition of the joint family in its degeneration. For some years after independence the ministries which were political joint families, had strong heads, e.g., Nehru at the Centre, or Dr. B.C. Roy, Pandit Gobinda Ballabh Pant, or Morarji Desai in the provinces. But during the last few years the strong heads have disappeared and we have the degenerate joint family in our politics, as mostly in private life, too.

The large joint family is, however, so out of tune with the spirit of the age that it cannot survive much longer. But the really dangerous aspect of the outlook is not the disappearance of the old joint family, but its survival in various spurious, disintegrated, and vestigial forms, all of which are bound to be worse than the large joint family. In fact, the small joint family of today, which is a transformation of the old joint family and in which fathers and married sons live together, is proving to be more harmful than the larger family. Yet today this form of the joint family is more common than the large joint family, especially in the cities. I have therefore to consider the evils it is perpetuating.

Among these evils two are serious: I. the monetary relations between the fathers and sons, and II. the relations between the mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. In both respects there is an increase of the maladjustments. In the large joint family these were distributed over many persons, and therefore were diffused. On the other hand, there was in

many cases a deciding authority above the quarrelling parties who were uninvolved in the quarrels. In the small joint families the quarrels are concentrated, and every member is a party to the quarrels. The entire family maladjustment is bilateral—either between the parents and the children or between the mothers-in-law and the daughters-in-law. These direct confrontations make the family conflicts very bitter.

I shall begin by considering the monetary relations between the fathers and the sons, now extended to the daughters, and by setting down my view of a sound and healthy relationship. Some fathers demand money from their children as a matter of right. They seem to think that they have been specially generous in feeding and supporting their children when they were helpless instead of abandoning them at birth. But the majority expect it as a matter of justice and at times of compassion. They think that they have been charitable in bringing up and educating their children and if the latter have any decency they ought to match paternal charity with filial charity. The fathers who are well off get angry if they cannot levy and realize the parental tribute, but they cannot make a case in equity (not to speak of contract) if they do not get the money. But the less well-to-do and poor fathers have a stronger moral position. They can raise a clamour and enlist the sympathy of others if their children do not give them money.

The mothers make a corresponding claim. They expect clothes, ornaments, and other gifts from earning sons, and if they do not get them bring down the house with their wails. They tearfully relate to sympathetic fellow-beldames how, even though not methranis, they had cleaned filth, only to be treated with such monstrous ingratitude. All agree that the child in question should have been exposed to death at birth. Some mothers are even more cunning. They place a frayed spot in their sari on the right place and, showing it to all friends, complain that the unnatural son does not care even about the bare buttocks of his mother.

The claims of the mothers are, however, a minor nuisance. Here I am concerned principally with those of the fathers.



The strength of the patriarchal tradition is such that the claim of the father is fully endorsed by society. An earning son living elsewhere is always expected to send a part of his earnings—the larger the better—to his father. Soon after getting into government service I went to my village, and the *jnatis* (relatives) asked me in Bengali: "*Bapke kee dish?*", which translated means, "What dost thou give to thy father?" I was very pert even then, and I used to reply shamelessly: "Nothing."

"Nothing!" used to be the shocked exclamation, "Why?"

"Because what I have to spend on myself in Calcutta is also my father's own expenses."

It will be seen that I gave my own interpretation to the patriarchal system. But I must add that in the good old days this interpretation (i.e., that the obligation was two-sided) was never disputed. If a son objected to marry under the new-fangled notion that one should not marry without an income, the father would say: "Have you got to worry about that as long as I am living?" And if, annoyed by further objection, he would even say tauntingly: "You will never marry if you wait to have an income to support a family, which anyway would not keep any wife of yours if she is of the right sort." Wealthy fathers were even more generous. Remembering their young days, they would look upon the son's expenditure in a house of ill-fame as their own expenditure and would instruct the *khajanchi* to put down any money the sons wanted for their *menus plaisirs* to the general account. But the patriarchal family has become wholly one-sided now.

The strange fact is that the more irresponsible and idle sons could always repudiate family responsibility, and get away with it. In the old days they loafed as long as the fathers lived, and then lived on whatever property they left, and if they left no property became cooks or servants. Nowadays they loaf and become Communists. But the good and conscientious sons had to go through mental agony, remembering their responsibility to their parents. They felt that the eyes of the anxious father were always on them when they were at college, and a look was coming on their faces which were those of over-driven horses

panting to the relay. I have described the mental strain of the good sons in my autobiography in these words :

“We saw the elders, both men and women, sitting head in hand, contemplating not only their own woes, which they thought were present, but also the woes of their children which they anticipated. Old Hinduism sat smoking his hookah all the while, ready to swallow the world in a bored yawn, and as if he, the greatest Old man of the Sea any voyager through life can ever encounter, was not enough by himself, he had at his side the nightmare of middle-class unemployment. All of us were led inexorably to believe that only some extraordinary and unpredictable stroke of luck could secure for us, not good employment, but even a meagre livelihood.”

This strain broke many of them even before they entered the world. But I am now horrified to see the same mental torture being inflicted on the daughters of the family. The parents cast the same looks of desperation on them and count each day that passes before they take their degree and can bring in money for the family. The demand on them is all the greater because a very large number of the young men think that they can neglect their family responsibilities on the ground that they have decided to make India Socialistic or Communistic. They look upon themselves almost as the new Buddhas, remembering that Buddha thought nothing of abandoning his wife and child in order to seek Enlightenment. But the Sakya Prince had his father the King to look after them; the new Buddhas leave it to their sisters.

The girls are indeed taking their family responsibilities bravely but at a terrible price—which is total emptiness in a life devoid of love, emotion, or aspiration. Seeing the serried ranks of young working Bengali girls in Calcutta, I have been saddened by their drawn faces and the grave bloom on them, which reminded me of the lines of Matthew Arnold on the gipsy child :

“Glooms that go deep as thine  
I have not known:  
Moods of fantastic sadness,

Nothing worth.  
Thy sorrow and thy calmness  
are thine own:  
Glooms that enhance and  
glorify the earth."

The fathers seem to be wholly unconscious of all this and dead to the suffering of their daughters; or perhaps they pretend to be unconscious as it suits their interest. Until the girls come out of college they look upon the problem of their marriage very casually, and when they begin to earn money they lose interest. In such circumstances, what are called 'love marriages' nowadays do sometimes take place. But, for one thing, these are matters of chance—hardly ten to a hundred; and, secondly, they are not love marriages properly so-called, but the result of some physical attraction which operates at a level of sensibility not susceptible to reason. Our social life is not such as to give any girl the capacity to fall in love wisely and marry successfully. So what success attends such chancy marriage are also very chancy. I shall have to discuss the new Hindu working woman at some length later.

Here, considering both the sons and the daughters I have come to the conclusion that the whole of the monetary relationship between parents and children should be put on a rational basis, and not left to drift from the old patriarchal framework to become any odd thing that comes out of the drift. And I would say that the very first step needed is to accept one reciprocal principle frankly and without qualification. This principle I will put in very categorical terms: the fathers have no moral claim on their sons or daughters for money; and the sons or even the daughters do not have any claim on the parents after they have attained majority. There is no question that both the sides can give any voluntary help they can. We should be inhuman if we did not do that. But there should be no idea of any obligation on either side.

Every man should make a point of providing for himself in his old age as he thinks of having an income for himself during his working life. In no circumstances should

he depend on being supported by his children in old age. In the provision for himself he must also include provision for his wife when he is dead. All his other financial responsibilities he must decide after he has made this primary provision. But I would add that my conception of a man's competence in his old age does not include that wretched fad or fetish—the possession of a house of his own in his dotage. This should be made secondary to every other claim. In fact, I treat this craving of an old man as senile weakness.

Coming to the children, I would say that a man should decide in the light of his existing income and calculation of possible future income what he would be able to spend on them, treating each child, male or female, equally. He should tell them frankly how long and to what extent he would be able to help them. If the father cannot finance his sons for the highest possible vocational education and for the highest openings, they must enter life at a lower rung and make their way upwards by their own enterprise. Above all, a father must not do one thing : he must not educate one son at an expense which would incapacitate him to educate his other sons in the same manner, and leave the other brothers to be helped by the better educated and better placed brother. There can be no family arrangement which is more unsound. It creates any amount of bad blood.

Finally, as to marriage, all fathers must leave it to their sons and daughters. In these days it would be understood that if the father has any money or property that would be equally divided between the children. So the marriages would take place, so far as they are dependent on monetary considerations, on financial incentives which would be well known and honest. On no account should there be special expenditure for the weddings, either in the way of pomp or for giving jewellery, furniture, clothes, etc., beyond what a father can easily afford. To bring about such a reform of our marriage system the marriages will have to be oriented on a new social outlook, and not regarded as the sordid commercial propositions they have become. I believe the elementary considerations I

have set down will put an end to the extremely unsatisfactory financial relations that exist between the fathers and the children in our society at present.

The other great evil of the small joint family is even worse than that which is created by the monetary relationship between the father and the son, and that is the mother-in-law's relationship with the daughter-in-law. It is thoroughly abnormal, and it results in suffering for both the sides. At one stage of their common living it is the daughter-in-law who suffers, but at a later stage it is the mother-in-law who does. The behaviour of the women at different times of life is surprisingly paradoxical. The woman who has been persecuted as a daughter-in-law will remember her experience and tap her revenge when the mother-in-law is a widow and dependent on her son, but she will never be kind or considerate to her own daughter-in-law : she will act the typical tyrannous mother-in-law.

As a matter of argument I can admit that there are circumstances which can compel the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law to live together in the same house. But I shall never consider it as desirable, far less as normal. It was what I heard from my mother which gave me this conviction. As it happened, the six years or so that she lived with her mother-in-law was a wholly rejected part of her life, for she came away from the ancestral village upon the death of her mother-in-law and father-in-law to live with my father alone in the small town in which he carried on his profession as lawyer, and she had all her surviving children there. Thus she was independent in the really significant part of her life over a period of thirty years. Yet the recollection of her life with her mother-in-law, in which there was according to her own express statement no persecution whatever, by her mother-in-law haunted her mind. This obsession came from a more subtle emotional clash. She told me again and again that her mother-in-law had laid a curse on her by always repeating the same formula : "Have every happiness but the happiness of the spirit." This, my mother added, had come true. All her life she was unhappy from this conviction.

This experience alone made me call the mother-in-law

daughter-in-law relationship as the fundamental aberration of Hindu life, and I set down my view of it in these strong words in my autobiography:

“Our young women, otherwise so demure and ready to efface themselves, gloat in unsubdued pride of flesh and pride of life on their power to snatch the son from the mother; and the desiccated old women, knowing and feeling every fibre of their being what the inevitable turn of the wheel will bring, wave back defiant and derisive curses on their callow rivals. Some of the mothers speak out, others send up their secret thoughts to God, the unfailing Dispenser of Justice. And those accursed homes in which the mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law live together, only heaven knows why, they are always smouldering from the fire of lovers’ kisses and mothers’ sighs. A stranger, not acclimatized to the immoral climate, but possessing keen sensibilities, can become physically aware of the glowing embers.”

Some may consider that exaggerated language. To that sort of objection I shall reply by saying that the mal-adjustment is so deep and fundamental that it requires imagination to form a correct idea of it. The conflict between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is not mere rivalry for power or over self-interest, it is biological and implanted in the frame-work of life. By the very method of perpetuating the species a man belongs to two women—his mother, from whose body he comes out; and his wife, with whom he has to unite physically in order to continue life. In human society these aspects of biological continuity are shared between two women, and therefore a conflict is created which can never be avoided. It is bad enough as it is, on account of the mere fact that it inflicts on any sensitive young man the problem of reconciling equally binding loyalties and loves, and it need not be aggravated by bringing together the two sides under one roof.

Very few married young men possess the wisdom or strength of mind to be able to manage the conflict in such a manner that neither his mother nor wife will have any sense of being unfairly treated. What is commonly seen is that some married young men side with the mother, and

some with the wife. Perhaps in traditional families it is more usual for the son to show more love and respect for the mother than for the wife, with whom his relationship is largely based on lust. When not driven by the physical urge, Hindu young men tend to show that he is tied throughout life with his mother by an invisible umbilical cord and placenta.

This has given rise to a very curious assumption regarding the duties of a young wife. It is assumed that except for the time spent in bed her sole duty is to serve her mother-in-law. In old days in Bengal when a son set out to marry, he took leave of his mother with the assurance : "Mother, I am going to fetch a maid-servant (*dasi*) for you." It must not be imagined that this assumption has disappeared. Even now my wife has to hear the remark, because my married son lives in Delhi in a separate house, that he should be brought over so that she may enjoy the *seva* of her daughter-in-law.

I wonder from where this curious conception of the duty of a daughter-in-law has sprung up. Not from ancient Hindu theory or practice certainly. All the stories of ideal wives told in the epics and elsewhere emphasize that the first duty of women is to her husband. Nowhere in our ancient literature is this more strikingly illustrated than in the case of Sita. As soon as Rama accepts exile Sita resolves to accompany her husband to the forests, and the Ramayana gives a long argument between the two. Rama points out the hardship of life in a forest, and Sita on her part says that Rama himself had taught her that a woman could not live without her husband. Rama never uses the argument that as his father and mother would be deeply grieved, she should remain behind to console and attend to them. And in fact even when she hears that Dasaratha is dead she does not come back to Ayodhya to take care of her widowed mother-in-law. On the contrary, she remembers the idyllic happiness of her life with Rama in the forest throughout her life.

Bhavabhuti describes her reminiscent mood in the play *Uttara Rāma Charita*. Lakshmana is showing Rama and Sita a series of pictures illustrating their life. When a great

banyan tree standing on the road to Dandakaranya is shown to Sita, she turns to Rama and asks: "Aryaputra, do you remember these regions?" Rama replies, "How can I forget? You were so tired with walking that you slept on my breast under that tree, tightly clasped in my arms." Could a modern Hindu girl educated in a convent, or for that matter even a young English wife, be more forgetful of the mother-in-law and her sorrows? It is the same with all the women who are held up to our admiration as ideal *satis*. So I must say that the servitude to the mother-in-law is no part of the ancient Hindu theory of the duties of a young woman.

However that may be, in recent times the daughter-in-law was expected to put her allegiance to her mother-in-law in the first place, and her *pativrata*—devotion to her husband next, at all events in public behaviour. This assumption did not work, and has not worked. The whole relationship has remained abnormal, though the abnormality has ranged from continuous, and the lowest conceivable, squabbles between the two to silently endured mental suffering. It is hard to say who suffers more. Of course the mother-in-law is more vocal in the narration of her trials, but the voiceless suffering of a meek daughter-in-law is often too deep for tears. And it does not always happen that she gets consolation even from her husband.

In old times the mother-in-law resented the slightest exhibition, even involuntary, of any love between her son and her daughter-in-law. I have read a very significant reference to it in a Bengali novel. The story is that of a modern, educated girl who was married into an orthodox family. Her young husband had come home from Calcutta, but being very intelligent she was suppressing every sign of the gladness of her heart for fear of rousing the jealousy of her mother-in-law. But it was breaking out in her quick steps and in the brightness of her eyes. The mother-in-law, the novelist added, had observed that and was not liking it. If anybody says that times have changed, the contemporary Hindu mother-in-law is not hurt by any external sign she sees of the love between her son and daughter-in-law, I would say that he is sadly mistaken. Even now,



even in so-called modern homes, the love of young couples has to be very discreet, it has to be sanctioned by the mother of the young man, and has to receive the imprimatur *Nihil Obstat* (nothing hinders), in a manner of speaking. By even giving this, and by saying to a son and daughter-in-law desperately waiting to be dismissed from the maternal presence, "Now you had better go to bed," a mother would consider herself exceptionally generous.

At the risk of being considered morbidly Freudian I would say that nearly all mothers, to a greater or lesser extent, are obsessed with the image of the physical relations between her son and her daughter-in-law. In the memoirs of a very exuberant French writer of this century I have read a story about a great French scholar and philosopher of the last century which I feel tempted to refer to in this connexion. The philosopher had an elder sister who had been a mother to him when he lost his own parents. She was unmarried and had money of her own. But as her brother could not marry on his own income, she very generously lived with him after his marriage, supplementing his earnings with her own money. In regard to her brother she was most loving and unselfish, and the brother paid a very moving tribute to her when she died. But, according to the malicious memoir-writer, she had her weakness, which was her excessive and even jealous love for the brother. This made her fasten jingle-bells to the curtain frame of the bed in which her brother and his wife slept. When at night she heard the bells tinkling, she would call out in an anxious voice: "Darling, you will catch cold."

I am quite sure that the story was an invention, but I am not sure that it does not express the desire which many Hindu mothers would have to hang puja bells to their sons' beds. At all events, I know of an authentic and recent instance of a mother sleeping between her newly married son and daughter-in-law. There is also another aspect of the behaviour of the mothers to the wives of their sons which I know very well, and that is their anger if the son sleeps with his wife when he is ill. "The *Rakshasi* (ghoul or vampire) will eat my son," they cry out. They become even more cruel if the sons are seriously or hope-

lessly ill. Then they send away the daughters-in-law to their fathers if they can, without thinking of the young woman's agony of mind.

However, this basic antagonism between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law hardly ever comes up to the surface of conscious mental life. It remains in the subconscious and makes the mother-in-law discover all sorts of rational or rationalized pretexts to separate the son from his wife. Traditional and uneducated women make no effort to understand their resentment, and are only prompted by it to find fault with the daughter-in-law at every trivial mistake. There is incessant scolding and nagging, and the worst humiliation for the daughter-in-law is to hear taunts and contemptuous remarks about her parents. At the slightest fault the mother-in-law will cry out to the daughter-in-law: "What sort of woman is your mother who did not teach you this?"

No behaviour different from hers, no ideas different from hers, and no ideals different from hers will be allowed by the mother-in-law to be valid. A young educated woman will be continually forced to behave in a manner which she does not like or approve, and be crushed out of any personality of her own. This is particularly true of religious beliefs and religious taboos. The mother-in-law will impose all her superstitions and irrational inhibitions, and set up a clamour if the daughter-in-law does not respect them. In making the daughter-in-law toe the line, she will exercise the most unscrupulous moral coercion on the son, and appeal to his love or sense of duty to her to make his wife live according to her own lights. She will set up wails of self-pity and imagined injury if her whims are not obeyed, and most sons, rather than face this, would advise the wife to conform at least for the time being, holding out the consolation that the mother will soon die. In this manner the mother-in-law will make her daughter-in-law submit to her in respect of vegetarianism, image worship, wearing of amulets and charms, observance of auspicious days, and obeisance to priests and gurus.

In this matter I have never been able to understand the attitude of even very modern sons. They usually say that

they have to respect the faith or religious susceptibilities of their mothers, without realizing that in this confrontation the real task is to make the mother respect the son's beliefs and convictions. The son should be capable of saying: "Mother, I do not object to your worshipping an image though I do not believe in it. You should also respect my faith by not insisting on my bowing before your images." Instead, they obey and even persuade their wives to obey. I once found a daughter-in-law, quite modern and educated, worshipping the form of Kali known as Chinna-Masta, without realizing what the figure wrapped up in cloth on whom Chinna-Masta was shown as standing represented.

But the worst injury that the mothers-in-law inflict on the daughters-in-law is to deprive them of their children, by making them love and obey the grandmother more than their mothers. When the mother-in-law lives with the daughter-in-law the young mother has no chance of being the first with her children. Children, and even babies, like to be pampered, and no mother with any sense of her child's good can compete with the grandmother in spoiling children. I know of instances in which the mothers-in-law have not allowed babies to have the kind of food the doctors advise until some religious ceremony enjoined by custom has been gone through at the prescribed age. The power of the grand-mother in the case of babies is always exercised in favour of fatty tissues at the expense of bones and muscles. That the joint family imposes moral invertibracy is known to all. It is prevented from inflicting compete physical invertibracy by the sheer impossibility of doing that. But it goes very far towards both.

In former times the daughter-in-law was subjected to physical torture, in addition to mental torture. Beating was common and even branding was not rare. Even in our times cases in which daughters-in-law have been driven to suicide by persecution have been common, and I have read of other instances in which the young daughter-in-law has even been killed. The worst part of the matter is that in such extreme cases the son, that is to say, the husband of the young woman, often helps the mother and becomes

an accomplice. I know that such cases are exceptional. But the truth remains that it is the spirit of the mother-in-law-daughter-in-law relationship, as found in the joint families, which makes such incidents possible. The whole atmosphere is vicious.

It becomes as vicious when, with the death of the father-in-law the daughter-in-law is able to turn the tables on the mother-in-law. I do not know how much improvement of the lot of the dependent mother has been brought about by the new Hindu inheritance law, but before it was passed there were few human conditions more miserable and humiliating than hers. As soon as the father was dead the sons would begin to shirk the responsibility for the mother. They would never agree to the course common sense would suggest—that is to say, fix an allowance which would keep the mother in reasonable comfort, and make that up with contributions from each son according to his capacity. On the contrary, every son under the instigation of his wife would say that he can do nothing, because his income is such that if he had to give any money to his mother his own children would be ruined, have no education, and even starve. It must not be imagined that any of the sons wanted the mother to be turned out in the street or starve her. All of them knew that one son either loved his mother more than the others or had a stronger sense of duty, and that he in disgust would take up the whole burden. Thus they would be spared both the sin of abandoning their mother and the pain of spending money on her. I know of a case in which the elder brothers, all with incomes over one lakh of rupees a year, repudiated the charge of the mother, and the youngest brother with about Rs. 700/- a month had to keep her as long as she lived. We Bengalis have a proverb which can be rendered into English rather freely as—"Attachment is equivalent to giving a hostage."

But this would not end the trials of the mother. For the rest of her life, which she would certainly pray to be made as brief as possible, she would have to bear with neglect and insults, these latter being sometimes implied and at other times quite rubbed in. Under the treatment she will not be given the indulgence of even wearing a sad

face. The daughter-in-law will then feel, and at times say openly, that her sighs and tears are bringing calamities to her children, operating as curses.

The inescapable conclusion is that the joint family has outlived whether usefulness it had, and the sooner it comes to an end the better will it be for everybody concerned. But that is precisely what will not happen. We Hindus only tolerate or endure changes, but never sanction them. Yet what is called for is an abandonment of the whole idea of the joint family, large or small, in principle and in practice. If family life is to be established on a proper basis in India this must be done.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Working Women*

Before I go on to consider the unitary family, which should be the normal family, I have to point out that even before the joint family has disappeared another phenomenon hostile to the growth of a real family has already appeared among us. This is to make women work for money. I regard the emergence of the working woman, unmarried as well as married, as the greatest threat to the family in every country and society, and as even a greater threat in India and Indian society. Before I discuss the specific threats, as they exist among us today, I shall, however, deal with the emergence of the working woman in India, beginning with the unmarried Hindu working girl. In my young days, when a girl was withdrawn from school or college in anticipation of marriage, we used to say that she was in the waiting-room. At present a far larger number of girls are to be seen in the same waiting-room, but it is now an office, and not the home. A bigger difference is that for many the train does not arrive at all; formerly, at the worst, it was unpunctual.

Before examining this situation I should like to recall what it was like fifty years ago, or a little later. Then no Hindu mother could look on a growing daughter with the eyes of Wordsworth :

“And vital feelings of delight

Shall rear her form to stately height,  
Her virgin bosom swell. . . .”

At the mere sign of such poetry she would begin to say that food was not going down her throat, and she would make such a hot home of it for the husband that the poor fellow would prefer drudging in the office to coming home without a proposal. I give an example of the desperation to which the nagging could drive a man.

In 1922 I was living in Mirzapore Street, Calcutta, with my younger brother, a medical student. Another student, a most handsome young man, used to come and read anatomy with him. It was a day of terrific downpour, but he came as usual. I could see that he had waded higher than knee-deep. Still he was smiling to himself, to explain which he told his story. With two others he was struggling through the flood, when they noticed an elderly man hardly able to make his way, but watching them. He asked what they were, and on being told that they were medical students, hesitated at first, and then blurted out : “Will any of you marry my daughter?” The young men pointed to the dirty eddies, and said : “Sir, is your daughter drowning in that water?” He replied sadly : “You would not have joked if you had a daughter.”

In old Bengal the nagging was worse. In that age the lachrymose side of the Bengali character had not swamped the witty and sarcastic. So, when a wife lashed out with her tongue, she could make an art of it. Thus a Rani, who had discovered that her daughter was hopelessly compromised but did not know that it was through a clandestine marriage, rushed like a tigress to the Rajah and upbraided him in the most devastating Bengali verse, of which I give a translation :

“You have at home an  
unmarried daughter,  
Yet to get her wedded do you  
bother?  
All right, you will now have  
done with suspense—

Be the happy grandpa' without  
expense!"

*O tempora, o mores!* Nowadays I see the mother not only not choking, but even enjoying her food with growing, and even toughening, and desiccating daughters before her eyes; the old miser of a father turning the blind eye, conscious of two advantages, keeping his own money and getting the daughter's; the young men, if brothers, happy to loaf in the streets at their sister's expense, and, if unrelated, gloating over the prospect of a girl friend, even though only to slink away at the sight of her door, not to speak of her father's face.

I hear the interjection—"Reactionary!" This is the modern Indian intellectual's equivalent of "Rats to you, sir!" of another biped. I am not frightened by it, for I prefer reason to catchwords. But before applying that reason to the working girl I would explain that she presents two faces—one, of the unmarried working girl; and the other, of the married working woman. The two belong to two worlds of social, economic and psychological mal-adjustment. The married working women harm the children, unmarried working girls themselves. I shall begin by considering the latter.

It is necessary to start at the point where the new phenomenon is most dangerous, that is, where it presents theories in justification. The first theory is intellectual, and, of course, it is the product of our abject servility to the West, or rather what we think is West. Thus, in our imitative zeal, we are given to proclaiming that the appearance of the Hindu working girl is a victory of progress over traditionalism. Is it indeed so? Is he trend even Western?

I see a little of Western ways, and if that is any evidence, the working girl there certainly is not of the future, though she is of the past. A Frenchman, who to my old eyes seems to have just left his Lycée but is discovered to be a Secretary to the Embassy, walks in with a charming wife and even children. The fact is that France is going through a demographic revolution in the forward gear, and according to the census of 1962 the below-twenties make up a third of



its population. The Americans, too, marry early, and I believe it is the same with the Russians. I say to Occidentals that the average marrying age, both for men and women, is now higher among us upper middle-class Hindus than among them. Nowhere else in the world is there any idea that earning bread and spinsterhood improve the feminine personality.

Of course, there are large numbers of unmarried working women in the West. This is due in part of demographic trends like an excess of the female population over the male, also to the longstanding tradition of some women remaining unmarried owing to want of money or beauty, or even from choice. But large numbers of unmarried working women are always regarded as a social problem, and students of history know very well that woman's emancipation, taken with *haute couture*, is as much a sign of decay in a society as is the presence of a bureaucracy, heavy taxation, high prices, a ruined middle-class, or homosexuality. The West may be decadent. Why copy it in India?

If the intellectual assumption behind the working girl is hollow, the emotional urge is a pretence. Those who bleat for a helpmeet in a wife, and speak of the normal wife as a domestic drudge, do not know that a man who takes his vocation seriously does not like his wife to meddle with it, no more indeed than a chess-player would have his wife dictating the moves to him over his shoulder, unless, of course, the wife happens to be a real co-worker in the field. Normally, it is only the trifler who wants to be coddled in his work by a wife.

Leaving that aside, what would our young men do with a helpmeet, if by that they mean a girl with spirit and personality? They are not doing anything big themselves. All over India our best young brains have set their heart on living in slothful ease either as a superior clerk in the IAS or as a superior mistri in some technical job. They are toys pursuing baubles. A wife with a personality is likely to be dangerous for them, because, much as they might profess to admire *A Doll's House* or *Anna Karenina* as a pose, I do not think they would care to give repeats of either the play or the novel in their own lives. As it is,

I notice that in upper-class Hindu society today the girls are always superior to the young men in intelligence, sensibility and enterprise.

Once all this camouflage is torn off, the new Hindu working girl is seen to be the product of a social evolution which has nothing deliberate or progressive about it. All talk that the girls are taking to bread-earning to live a richer life or acquire a higher personality is undiluted bunkum. They are only pawns in a process of helpless and often cowardly surrender to external circumstances on the part of their parents. And the most important fact is that the major external compulsion is not economic.

There was no time in our society in which the marriage of the daughters was not a financial burden. It crippled most families, ruined many, and perhaps only a fraction did not feel the pinch. In fact, the new Hindu law of inheritance has eased the economic burden of marrying daughters. What has really happened is that there is greater freedom to give in to the financial pinch, because the social compulsion to marry the girls has been relaxed, and the stigma attached to unmarried girls has lessened. So, I am not surprised to hear fathers saying that they cannot marry the daughters for want of money and to see that they are building houses in the upstart suburbs of Calcutta. In the old days they mortgaged the ancestral house to marry the girls.

The real difficulty has been created by the breakdown of the traditional system of marriage which worked through the nexus of blood and marital relationships. This, in its turn, is due to the movement of upper-class Hindus into the overgrown cities, which in India are not urban societies, but agglomerations of human beings in search of employment. Hindu society is showing itself to be incapable of reorganizing the marriage system on a new basis, and its bankruptcy in respect of the most crucial of human relationships is shown by the matrimonial advertisements, which put marriage on the same footing as jobs or sale of Pedigree puppies.

In this situation some talk of "love marriages" as a solution, without any notion of the social background

of Western marriages, and without knowledge of the behind-the-scenes which makes falling in love possible. Here is an example. Sir Thomas Bertram notices the clever and rich Henry Crawford paying somewhat pointed attentions to his niece Fanny, who has no money, and he sees nothing in her manner of receiving them which he could disapprove of. A few days later he announces a thoroughly worked out plan for a ball at Mansfield Park, at which he hopes to get together thirteen or fourteen young couples. On the day of the ball, he goes up to Fanny and asks if she is engaged, and gets the reply : "Yes, sir, to Mr. Crawford for the first dance," which is what he expects. A proposal of marriage duly follows. Indeed, to assume that "love marriages" are made in heaven, or by *niyati* as we Hindus say, is like assuming that any girl with an itch to swing her legs can go up to the stage and become Dame Margot Fonteyn.

Unfortunately, Hindu society will neither organize "love marriage" nor reorganize arranged marriage. The result is awful, for the girls are neither at anchor nor sailing, but only drifting. They take up jobs just because there is nothing better to do, and for some years, are propped up by a sort of matrimonial Micawberism. Also, the majority get married, though with a wholly unnecessary delay. While hope lasts, they naturally dress for the office as if they were going to a dinner, and the time they can save from the adornment of their persons they devote to the neglect of their work. But gradually, they settle down to a dull resignation or a sullen hatred of all males. Some marry even after reaching this mood, too late for love, too late for joy, too late, too late! At best, for those who do not marry, there is the consolation of a little money.

The worst part of the matter is that, when deprived of the elemental psychological and physical needs, a man or a woman can cheat the mind, but never the body, which will assert itself. Thus the green woods of passion are replaced by the scrub of sensuality. There is such a thing as erosion of the personality, as of soil.

No girl need pay such a price if what she seeks is achievement, say, in literature or science or any high sphere of

mental life. To have been Mrs. J.M. Robertson did not prevent the lady in question from writing one of the greatest novels of the twentieth century, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*. Marie Sklodowska and Irene Curie did not cease to be scientists when they took the names of Curie and Joliot. Beatrice Potter's social and economic research did not become less rigorous when she became Beatrice Webb. Agatha Christie has not become less entertaining by being the wife of an archaeologist. No, no, it is no more necessary for a woman who has it inside her, to remain unmarried to do great things than it is for a man. On the contrary, a happy married life is an aid to achievement.

Next comes the desire for economic independence, as if having to eat bread by the sweat of one's brow was not the worst servitude. In England, in the spacious days of real economic independence, a woman came with a settlement which enabled her not only to endow her daughters but even to provide for her younger sons. We have *stridhan*. But the main thing is that in Hindu society a woman need not have her own money to be the absolute mistress of money. Our society does not know that kind of arrangement by which a wife gets her house allowance and pocket money, and has no further power over her husband's income. In wealthy Hindu families the wife is always the controller of money, and the higher the income the more rigorous is the control.

In point of fact, the wife's power goes much further, to illustrate which I shall relate an anecdote. When I was working in the Military Accounts Department in the twenties, I knew of a young man who was an income-tax officer. He got married, and the immediate effect was intense depression, due to his experience of the wedding night. The bride asked him what he was, and what was his salary. When satisfied on these points, she asked how long he had been in the job. When she heard that it was for about two years, she put the last question : "What have you done with that money?" If with such power over the husband's money, and the additional power of demanding a retrospective balance-sheet, our girls now think that they have to sweat to have economic independence by earning far

less money than their prospective husbands, they must be very foolish indeed.

Last of all comes love, which many think is incompatible with marriage. If this is called freedom in love, it is, of course, all wrong, for freedom and love are mutually exclusive things. All love is bondage, happy bondage though. What people mean when they speak of love in this special sense, is a wholly different thing. If a girl's tastes lean that way, I say that in Hindu society at least there is no need to remain unmarried, for this society has always been too worldly wise, too tired, and too blasé not to recognize that human nature claims indulgence and it has therefore always been tolerant of a little sexual sub-promiscuity.

But to those who want real love, I would commend two sayings of a French moralist, who was also a duke. He did not think very highly of the married state, for he wrote that "there were good marriages, but no delightful ones," and he had also considerable experience of gallantry with duchesses and marchionesses. Yet he wrote : "The last thing which is to be found in flirtation is love." The second maxim is better still : "The greatest miracle accomplished by love is that it cures flirtation." So I would ask our girls to take the plunge and I know they would, if only, alas! there were more manly young men about.

Let me now turn to the married working woman. But before dealing with her as she is in India I have to consider her as she is in the contemporary West. This is unavoidable because the Indian phenomenon is really derivative. Its practical emergence is due substantially to the impact of Western influences, and its apologia is wholly imported. To cut the matter short, as in political ideas, economic organization, literature and art, or fashion, here too we are faced with a case of imitation, the working woman being only the economic counterpart of the woman in jeans.

Therefore the specific feature of all forms of the imitation of the West in India is seen here also. This is absence of discrimination and criticism, which blocks all attempts at finding out why the working woman has appeared in the West, what problems she has created there, what the

latest trends in European thought about her is, and how she fits into the Indian way of life. Yet without considering the model it is impossible to discuss the copy. So let me begin with Europe.

I shall begin by saying that for the student of sociology or history the working woman is neither good nor evil; the student does not feel that he has to pronounce an evaluative judgment; he just studies the occurrence and the aetiology of the phenomenon. As a result, he sees that the working woman is the product of both social and historical conditions.

To take the sociological point of view first. It reveals that women, married or unmarried, join their menfolk in the same kind of work in certain strata of society, in others they do not. To be more explicit, it is in the working classes that women share with the menfolk the burden of agricultural and industrial production, so far as they can do so after performing their own work, which is child-bearing, child-rearing, and housekeeping. Even in a traditional economy this is the norm. For instance, in India a peasant woman with even a newborn baby will go out to work in the fields, leaving the baby with an older child, usually a sister and almost a baby herself.

On the contrary, in aristocratic society women did not work, and remained within their sphere so long as anything like aristocracy remained. The romantic reason for it was that they had to remain on a pedestal to be worshipped by the men. This was seen as much in ancient India as in Europe. In Bhavabhuti's *Uttara-Ramacharita*, Rama always addresses Sita as Devi, *Domina*; and in these days I am delighted to hear a high Bengali official in New Delhi using the same form of address to his wife.

One might even count how many times Rama falls at Sita's feet. Among the latter-day Hindus, till recently, it was the wife who was falling at the feet of the husband; in ancient India it was the husband who fell at the feet of the wife. Recall the stage direction in *Sakuntala*—Raja—(*Sakuntalayah padayoh pranipatya*) . . . and Sakuntala's reply, "*Uttisthatu Aryaputra*." (Falling at feet of Sakuntala; get up, Aryaputra!)

Again, after seeing a picture of their joined hands at their wedding Rama says to Sita,—“*Tava murtiman iva mahotsavah karah,*”—“Your hand, the embodiment as it were of festive splendour.” This could not have been a hand hardened by work in a field or office, and still less by all kinds of furtive squeezing by a succession of “boy friends”.

But behind the romantic reason there was a more matter-of-fact reason. Aristocratic society was a military society in its origins, and it remained that even after it had become a class of landowners. Now, in this society the proper work of the men was fighting, but since wars were not continuous, their principal recreation in peace time was making love. So they could not afford to have their women so toughened by routine work as to be indifferent to their return from war and dehydrated of amorousness. They could no more make love to such women than they could eat bolted lettuces.

This military background established the pattern of feminine life in aristocratic society, and the pattern continued. Even being able to help themselves went against the code of conduct of the women of this class. For instance, Sir Osbert Sitwell relates that his mother, Lady Ida Sitwell, was as helpless as an Infanta and could not even fasten her shoes. This, he explains, was due to the influence of an age when to be helpless was the mark of a certain breeding. Thus, he adds, she would not have deigned to pick or arrange flowers, some one else would have had to do it for her.

Her daughter, Dame Edith Sitwell, seemed to have begun like that. When five years old she once, out of some caprice, wanted to run away from home. But she was caught in the outskirts of the town, because she could not lace her boots and they were so loose that it had become impossible for her to walk in them. In fact, the nanny in childhood, and the lady's maid when grown up, were indispensable adjuncts to the life of these women.

But a deeper question of human life is also involved in the antithesis between the working woman and the woman of leisure. It is the old question of the individual versus

society. On those levels of society where the individual significance of a human being is swamped by his or her collective function, women work like men, and on those where personality counts the difference between the sexes in respect of work is maintained, for leisure is necessary for the development of personality.

Women are the personalities *par excellence* in every civilized society. Though no great man of action or thinker or poet can be without a strong personality, in him, however, the product of the personality often overshadows the personality itself, or they become so fused as to be indistinguishable. But a woman reigns solely by virtue of what she is in herself. It is she who makes a society radiant, and, furthermore, it is she who moulds her sons as personalities. In the creation of these, the mother's role is infinitely more important than that of the father. "But if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?"

Thus to the sociologist the working woman is connected with class structure and function. The student of history, on his part, discovers that she is the product of a particular stage of evolution. For instance, the present-day world is going through a far-reaching technological and economic revolution, whose primary expression is industrialism. This is making such demands on human labour that women are being drawn in ever greater numbers into manual or office work.

But this economic revolution only affects women of the working classes, or makes women of the other classes, when they are drawn into it, working class women; forcing them to lose their original class affiliation. The working woman in the leisured upper classes is a wholly different phenomenon. Her appearance in our age is connected with the present stage of decay of European life and culture. Feminism, of which the professional woman is one of the products, emerges at the fagend of the life of a society, when it is past its prime and is moving towards stagnancy.

At bottom, the equality of the sexes in respect of vocation seems to be due to a biological trend, decline of fertility, which is normal in a decadent society. This brings about, and is accompanied by, a change in the reproductive part



of the endocrine system, in which the gonads are not only instruments of reproduction but also very powerful influences on the behaviour pattern. So, if these are atrophied, an epicene psychological type appears.

In respect of sexual behaviour, more especially, the finer mental responses are eroded, though the morphological differentiation between the sexes cannot be done away with. As a result, sexual life tends to lose its passionate overtones and is left only with its physiological fundamental note, so that when and where the epicene tendency is very pronounced people begin to think, as they are doing in very "advanced" Western circles today, that the choice between homosexuality and heterosexuality is only a matter of taste. The professional woman from the upper classes is another expression of the epicene tendency, its extension from the biological to the social function.

A decadent society has also its specific moral drift, which is towards hedonism and from that to egoism. When a society is young or in its prime, and when the man-woman relationship is living, the question of financial dependence or independence between man and wife does not arise at all. The woman is never a doll in the husband's doll's house, nor is the husband the galley-slave in the wife's galley. It is the hedonism-*cum*-egoism of a decadent society which divides the husband from the wife, and the wife from the husband, and makes the wife think that she must be financially independent of her husband. In a living society even the relatives of a girl do not feel embarrassed to be under financial obligation to her lover.

As Elizabeth Bennet's aunt wrote to her to explain why Mr. Gardiner, her uncle, had accepted Darcy's offer to pay Wickham's debts, to buy him a commission, and to settle some money on Lydia, which involved some thousands of pounds,—“But in spite of all this fine talking, my dear Lizzy, you may rest perfectly assured that your uncle would never have yielded, if we had not given him credit for another interest in the affair.”

Mr. Bennet's comment when he learned of Darcy's contribution, is equally revealing : “So Darcy did everything; made up the match, gave the money, paid the fellow's

debts, and got him a commission! So much the better. It will save me a world of trouble and economy. Had it been your uncle's doing, I must and would have paid him; but these violent young lovers carry everything their own way."

Elizabeth herself simply said : "Mr. Darcy, I am a very selfish creature; and for giving relief to my own feeling, care not how much I may be wounding your's. I can no longer help thanking you for your unexampled kindness to my poor sister." These were the ways of a society which had not sacrificed love or even life to egoism. The man who paid the money not only did not want any gratitude, but did not even want the woman he loved to be informed of his generosity; and the woman who gained by the money not only did not think that she had received alms, but even felt proud of the man who loved her, because she thought that in a cause of compassion and honour he had been able to get the better of himself.

Having considered the original, I am now free to examine the copy, or rather the attempt at copying, for the replica is not exact. But the mere fact of being second-hand, although imperfectly, is important.

In India today there are only two sources of moral confidence, *a fortiori* of moral arrogance. The first of these is conformity to the Hindu way of life which is believed to be eternal and superior to all others; and the second, conformity to Western fashions, which is the conformism of the progressists. Thus most Hindus of the second category think that if they do not have the working woman when the West has her that would be lagging behind in development.

But the crucial fact is that this desperation to be developed is not natural. That is to say, the married working woman is not organic in India, as she is in the West. Her emergence here is not related to any trend inherent in our social and cultural evolution, and still less in our physiological evolution, though it is in part a product of economic circumstances.

Even casual observation fails to reveal any decline of fertility. From my roof, on which the only living things are plants, I can always see anything from 10 to 40 children.

In the streets I hardly see a young mother with a baby in her arms who is not also dragging a toddler by the hand. The scooters are overburdened with children in addition to the wife behind the husband, so that these can say as did the camel; "As for a scooter, it is,—ridden by families."

In the more well-to-do homes the number of children is not so large, but the women wear an undiminished proliferating look. There is no loss of that femininity which comes from the influence of the hormones. It is a mistake to think that you can have the professional woman simply by adopting "family planning".

If therefore there is no epicene tendency on the one hand, on the other the psychological prerequisite for the working married woman does not also exist. In other words, the emotional pressure which makes women desire to rival men in their work—political, administrative, intellectual, literary, artistic, or philanthropic, does not exist to any significant degree. The motivation is overwhelmingly pecuniary, compulsive or optional. The women as a class work for money, their bravado comes from the same source, as also their new self-respect as the equal of any man in matters of money. This devotion to money is supposed to be very progressive because it is bolstered up by the Western science of economics. Say "Economics", and all sordidness is glorified.

But say "Hindu", and money is even more glorified. The so-called "Secularists" in India do not know that Hindu society has never needed Western theories to justify the pursuit of money. No society has been more frank on this score. In the Hindu view, *dharma* (morality), *artha* (money or worldly success), *kama* (desire), and *moksha* (salvation) are equally valid objects of life. So, in the Hindu order, when you are in the world you are also expected to be of it. You are not to put any curb on your desire for money. On the contrary, you are to pursue money *ajaramaravat*, i.e., as if you were above senility and death.

Hindu women fully shared this general Hindu love of money. But they satisfied it at second-hand through the husband, and it must be said to the honour of all Hindu husbands that they never revolted against the relentless

control of their incomes by their wives. Nowadays it has become possible to satisfy the urge independently by earning money themselves. That is the new element in the situation.

As a rule, most Hindu married working women today work because they also worked before they were married. The breakdown of the traditional system of arranged marriages compels a large number of girls to take up jobs as an interim distraction. During this period of enforced spinsterhood they acquire the love of money, and cannot give it up. Thus, in a manner of speaking they behave like man-eaters which cannot give up human flesh after having once acquired the taste for it.

But, certainly, I would not blame them for it. When even overpaid ICS men take a renewed spell of servitude for the sake of money after their retirement, how can one condemn young women in the prime of life? Besides, the groom and his people regard the bride's salary as the new dowry. Those who say that the dowry system has disappeared in Hindu society are like people who think that they have done away with untouchability by calling the depressed classes Harijans.

There is besides a sort of negative feed-back for this love of money from another feminine urge, love of clothes. In the emotional life of our womenfolk three loves—for husband, for child, for saris—constitute a harmonic triad, in which the last love is the treble, the second middle-register, and the first the bass note. But even this shrill love is not strong enough to make Hindu women easy in mind if they have to draw on the main income of the family to satisfy it. If they do so, they can never get over their sense of guilt and risk. But a marginal income smooths matters. I know what a staple of vivacious and continuous conversation the sari is even in highbrow senior common-rooms of women's colleges.

But it will be objected that most married women have to work out of sheer necessity, because the husband's income is not enough to meet the basic needs of a family. I concede that at once for the majority of the married woman workers. But, to my thinking, the remedy adopted is worse than the

disease, nothing better than taking the least line of resistance, or a way out suggested by defeatism, submitting to circumstances instead of conquering them. A truly intelligent society would have set about the business in a wholly different way.

Let me take the collective remedies first. I strongly maintain that if family life is to be saved as something of irreplaceable value, the income of one member of a family should be adequate to maintain the whole family on a civilized standard of living. The State and all employers should be made to fix such scales. If prices, on the other hand, are high and unrelated to the general level of income, drastic steps should be taken to check inflation. The social aspect of double or triple employment for one family should not be overlooked either. Unless employment in a society is virtually unlimited, extra employment for one family is bound to deprive another family of employment.

Of course, such remedies can be applied only by the society at large, and principally by the State. In India that is precisely the difficulty, for such action cannot be expected from the society we live in and the State that we have. So, the only way left is for the individual to do something, and here again the action, so far as it has been taken, has been just doing the most obvious thing.

I should think that, faced with the wants created by an inadequate income, the man would try to increase it by extra production or better production. That, at all events, was what I did when I found that my standing income was utterly insufficient for my family responsibilities. My case is significant because my profession, writing, is one of the least remunerative, and if something could be done even in this line, much more can be done in more paying walks of life.

Up to the age of forty my income was only Rs. 100 a month, out of which Rs. 50 went to pay house rent, and I had also long spells of unemployment. My wife and I went through trials which I do not like to recall even now. She offered to take up work, but I objected. I thought that was my duty. So I resolved to add to my income by extra work and better work, and I am glad to be able to say that

in ten years I raised my income from Rs. 1,200 a year to Rs. 12,000 a year, and even in two years my financial position was so improved that when my third son was born in 1939 I used to call him Benjamin.

What I, with my wretched health, weak body, not very great will power, and natural indolence could do, I do not see why others with more normal physical and mental powers would not be able to do.

But what comes in the way is a special attitude to work, I should rather say, a hostile attitude to work properly so called. Most middle-class Indians want a desk job in which the wages are not related to production, and therefore they cannot add to their income. They pay for their disinclination to productive work by having completely inelastic incomes.

Yet, if they had realized what they were losing by making their wives work and what they were making the children suffer, I am sure they would have acted differently. But two things, aversion to productive work and ignorance about the real value and joy of family life, to which is added complete indifference to the good of society and of the future generations, make them incapable of perceiving even their own loss. I often ask people who are obsessed with the burden of earning a living—why do you sacrifice living to livelihood? They do not even understand the question.

On the other hand, finding that the evil was coming to us ostensibly from Europe, I have been trying to find out for some years what the European people are thinking about the problems created by the working married woman, and the answer I have come upon is decisive. Some years ago a noted German paediatrician declared that the seventh child of a family, hanging on to the dirty apron strings of its mother, was happier than the child in the best creche. Another German paediatrician who has gone deeply into the problem is even more emphatic. After drawing attention to the fact the 24% to 30% of German school-children are key children, that is, they have to open their front doors because when they come back there is no mother at home, he says :

“It is not mere old-fashioned sentimentality to say that

a mother's place is at home. The feeling of safety in the family cannot be replaced by anything else; how can that be preserved for the child if the mother goes out unnecessarily to earn additional money?"

He goes on,

"Recent results of experimental animal psychology yield additional evidence for the crucial importance of the close relations between mother and child, inasmuch as they demonstrate that during the early period of life external events exert a profound formative influence on the individual. These experiments may not be applicable to man without modification, but if we consider the extraordinary dependence of infants upon the persons nursing them, which is even stronger than in animals, we doubt whether we are really justified in insisting upon separate beds for our children: perhaps the mothers of Italy, Japan, India, and Africa are on a better track when they insist on carrying their children around with them?"

The writer is Professor Klaus Betke of Tübingen. Another paediatrician, Dr. Hellbrugge of Munich, declares that mass-care institutions even when provided with the best medical and hygienic facilities, are a very poor substitute for a mother's love and care, and the fact that there is such a demand for such institutions nowadays throws a poor light on our civilization. My wife and I have had to take care of, almost bring up, a child whose mother had to take up work when he was five months' old. We can testify to the truth of what these paediatricians say: the little boy holds his head high and does not sneak about.

Dr. Kurt Georg Kiesinger, the distinguished German political thinker and statesman, takes the question of the working woman to another sphere.

"I often wonder" he says, "whether our womenfolk do not fare somewhat better than we do—that is, in so far as they do not follow a man's profession. They are less exposed to outside pressures; their world is less heterogeneous and is more likely to remain unscathed. This question is worth pondering over deeply, for it seems to me that despite all signs of equality between the sexes, *homo faber*

leaves too small a place for the beneficent influence of woman both in his working hours and in his free time. The woman herself suffers through this and the man suffers even more, most of all when he no longer realizes what a loss it implies for himself and for our national culture."

I cite these remarks only to indicate the trend of the latest thinking in Europe about the working woman, which would shed a new kind of light on our frenzy to imitate what is coming from the West, even from Hollywood. But, as the distinguished Bengali critic, Pramatha Chaudhuri, said long ago : "It seems to be our destiny to wear the cast-off clothes of Europe."



## CHAPTER THREE

### *Marriage in Hindu Society*

A sound, sensible, and therefore successful marriage is the foundation of a good, happy, and fruitful family life. Perhaps the adjective 'fruitful' will give rise to a good deal of scandal in these days in India, for it is likely to be taken as the key-word of a reactionary attitude towards 'family planning' or, to call a spade a spade, towards the means of enjoying the pleasure of sexual intercourse without the attendant risk of conception. If I were dealing with that aspect of married life I would have indulged in a good deal of plainspeaking on that topic. But here I am not doing so, and the word 'fruitful' is being employed, not in its procreative denotation, but in its extended application to anything which bears results, which, of course, means the desired or desirable results. In simple words, when I speak of a fruitful family life what I mean is the kind of family life which produces and fosters a satisfactory home life, that is to say, the sort of life which guarantees pleasant and loving relations among those who have it, and by so doing also contributes to the development and permanence of culture in a particular society.

It should be obvious that for all this a sound and sensible marriage is indispensable, and that an unsatisfactory married life also means an unsatisfactory family life. But is 'love' in the more exclusive sense of being a merging of

the personalities of a man and a woman based on the fundamental note of sexual attraction but with an infinite number of emotional overtones, necessary for the marriage which I consider sound and sensible and which guarantees a fruitful family life? Theoretically, even people in this country who do not marry after falling in love but do often fall in love after marrying, would say that love is necessary for the best kind of marriage. I also believe that for the highest type of married life, and for married life which offers the intensest personal satisfaction, love is indispensable.

But that is the one thing which no man can guarantee or safeguard, not even when he has made what in this country is called a 'love marriage'. Love in that form is a very complex feeling depending for its birth and sustenance on a number of extremely subtle attractions. I am puzzled by its character, though I certainly believe in love at first sight, that is to say, in love as an overriding passionate commitment when one of the parties has had no knowledge whatever of the other person's character or personality. This is not a creation of fiction or poetry, i.e., of the imagination. Love at first sight may be a stark fact. In fact, Max Müller, whose life I am now writing and who was editing the Rigveda and studying Sanskrit at the time, fell in love at first sight with a young English girl of nineteen. What was more, he made a successful job of it, which is far more difficult than merely falling in love.

But I have never been able to explain it in terms of the intellect. The process of falling in love appears to be largely sub-rational or supra-rational. Intellectual analysis may lay bare certain impulses which compel a man or a woman to feel an irresistible attraction to another man and woman. Strange as it might seem, I have found that some of these impulses may be very abstract, that is to say, even geometrical. Therefore I once gave an analysis of what I called the 'geometrical basis' of love. I am setting forth below that article, just by way of demonstrating how deep and yet capricious an emotion love can be. I thought, by drawing attention to the geometrical basis of love, I should be helping our young men, and so I wrote.

It is only at the end of life, when to marry again would

be folly, that a man discovers how he should have married so as to have been happy in marriage; that is to say, to have brought into it that particular joy which is derived from having love as an ingredient in it. Many old men marry on the strength of the discovery, but only to find that acquiring the competence to preach does not bring in its train the competence to practise.

For long years before my marriage—they *were* long for I married at the age of thirty-four—I had given serious and continuous thought to the problem and assumed that I had arrived at some sound notions. I have now realized that what I regarded as thought on this subject in my unmarried days, prolonged as they were almost till middle age by our standards, was not thought at all, but callow day-dreaming, and at times dreaming in sleep as well. Real wisdom on this score has only been recently vouchsafed to me, and I wish to share it with young men who can make use of it. But I very much doubt if they will accept a share.

But should the saying—*Si jeunesse savait; si vieillesse pouvait!* be the eternal lament for failure in life? Let me at least try to persuade youth to act on the knowledge of age. I shall begin at the point when our young men stand at the cross-roads between happiness and unhappiness in marriage, and take the crucial turning—that is to say, when the parents or other persons *in loco parentis* have arranged a marriage and ask the young man to set the seal of make-believe love on it by staring at the girl either barefacedly in her home with the avowed intention of marrying, or with affected innocence under the pretence of meeting her casually in a restaurant. I am surprised to find in these days how many of our young men who have lived in the West and have decided to live there, come to their country to marry in this fashion.

This, to my thinking, is an artificial and unsatisfactory compromise between arranged marriages and marriages which result from falling in love. It makes the worst of both worlds, and therefore I dislike it intensely. I say to people who resort to this subterfuge: "Either marry

in the genuine Hindu way or in the genuine Western way, do not mix up methods which are not compatible." But we modern Hindus are nothing if we are not always falling between two stools.

Before the latest camouflage was put on the custom of inspecting girls for marriage, it was a brutal affair—absolutely like the procedure for buying a horse, cow, or dog by examining all its points. In my time this was the usual mode of premarital meeting between a young man and his proposed bride. But I had set my face against it as an exhibition of inhuman cruelty. Therefore, when my brother, who had married by looking at his future bride by proxy through my eyes and who then had had eleven years of married life, proposed that I should go and take a good look at any girl my father was going to select for me. I flatly refused. I said bluntly that if they were going to drag me into the arrangement they had better have nothing to do with my marriage. Since I had quite deliberately opted for an arranged marriage I was going to be a wholehogger, and all that I wanted to know was the date and place of the wedding. I thought I would take my chance blindfolded, but not accept my doom with open eyes, if doom it was to be.

My reasoning was like this. I felt that if I did go and look at a girl with a view to marriage no choice would be left to me, and I should never be able to say, No. I knew what I would feel if a girl came to look at me for the same purpose and said that she would not marry me because she did not like my looks or my figure, which, given the facts of my appearance, she was bound to do; so I did not wish anybody else to have the same sense of humiliation. I have not even yet learnt what my wife thought when she first saw me: she has taken whatever was in store for her with philosophy and good grace.

But I now recognize that in spite of its cruelty the procedure had and has some adumbration of truth in it, but only a faint adumbration and nothing more. Therefore I want to set down its assumptions quite clearly. The unanalysed life, said Plato, was not worth

living. I would say that in marriage the unanalysed body of the future bride is not worth having. This sounds like being brutal. But logic is always brutal, and perhaps even a brutal logic in a better foundation for compassion and love than impulsive sympathy.

The truth of the matter is that love is primarily visual, though in persons without sight it may be tactile. Without seeing there is no loving, and no man can love a woman if the geometrical properties of her body do not tally with his geometrical predispositions, which will control his aesthetic and amorous inclinations. All men are born with predetermined likes and dislikes in respect of form, and in the case of the feminine form the likes and dislikes are, of course, concerned with curves, not with straight lines. It is possible to admire the pyramids of Ghizeh and the Parthenon at Athens, but not to fall in love with them. Yet admiration for the dome of the Taj or the Gol Gumbaz at Bijapur, if consciously analysed, may lead to falling in love wisely. The geometry of linear curves and of spheroids is, in a manner of speaking, interwoven with love.

I do not see why the validity of such a theory should not be admitted *a priori*. Light, sound, colour, and indeed all forms of energy are transmitted by waves, and it is only a natural corollary to assume that love as a very powerful and beautiful form of energy should be dependent on waves and wavelengths. I once got a decisive, though also a chastening, demonstration of the power of curves when I was a young man and living in Calcutta. One day I saw the figure of a girl on the lawn before our house standing with her back to me, and the vision completely bowled me over. I was enthralled. But in a moment I woke up to the reality. It was only a red-bordered sari on a clothes-line, which had been blown out by the wind. The wind which bloweth where it listeth had also created in the same casual and unconcerned manner that ineffable concinnity. I never felt more foolish in my life, but I learned my lesson.

But it is not a matter of any curve or wave. A wireless set may be tuned to different wave-lengths, we unfor-

fortunate men are pre-tuned to certain wave-lengths only and remain utterly dead to others. I have seen men whose interest in their wives has been blasted by particular curves, and who ogle at the curves of other men's wives, though to a purely geometrical eye one set of them would seem to be as good as another. My friend the late Bibhuti Bhushan Banerji, author of *Pather Panchali*, had a predisposition to the circular in the female face. He used to say to me : "My dear Nirad, I want the face to be like the moon, fully round". (In Bengali, "*Bhai Nirad, ami chai mukh khana chandpana habe, dibbi gol*".)

Now, this infatuation of the West-Bengal Bengali for a blown-out face was my particular abomination. I had not adored the face of Durga on the images in my childhood to be able to love and admire any but ovoid and elliptical faces. But I think in this instance quite an inadmissible image has come to be associated with the Sanskrit phrases : *Chandramukhi* or *Chandranana*, which certainly did not want to suggest that a beautiful face was circular like the moon. So I translated the Sanskrit phrase *Sampurna-Chandranana* in a Sanskrit poem, not as "with a face like the full moon", but as "even as moonlight fair."

But this is overdoing an argument. No human face can be a circle, a parabola, or a hyperbola; it can only be an ellipse. But this does not simplify the bias, for even ellipses can have almost infinite variations. The critical question for every man is to be able to decide which gradient of an ellipse appeals to him most. This can be done only after the most rigorous self-analysis. If he has not subjected himself to such a discipline a man might fall for a relatively round or a relatively flat ellipse, to find only after marriage that he cannot live with it. How to train the choice in ellipses in therefore the question. To this I shall now give some attention.

The best method of discovering the preference is to begin where it is at its simplest and most neutral. For this purpose a young man should provide himself with the stencil for engineering drawing which contains French

curves. He should trace these curves on good drawing paper with a 4B pencil. Bad paper and too hard a pencil (even only H) will produce hard and lifeless curves, while the imperceptible burr left by a 4B pencil on good paper will put across the living, rhythmic, and soft effects which are essential for a correct judgment. Naturally, the period of trial will be long, for aesthetic preferences like wine take time to mature.

This practice will, however, train the senses only in judging consistent curves, but no female body is ever made up of such a single curve. It is formed by a very complex organization of disparate curves, each with its own gradient. So these have to appeal and transfix individually as well as severally. In fact, it is in their combination that the curves become explosive and shattering. Therefore, if one's senses are to be properly trained, that must be done through a study of very elaborate organizations of curves in art.

For this I can only recommend the drawings of the great masters. But Indian, Chinese, and South Asian sculpture will also do, because all Oriental art, including even sculpture in the round, is overwhelmingly linear. In Calcutta, the sculpture galleries of the Indian Museum should provide very good training ground.

Nevertheless, one caution I must set down. In Indian sculpture the female body is highly stylized, and it exaggerates the curves so much that it becomes difficult to feel any parallelism between the work of art and life. For example, however great the admiration the Chauri-bearer of Didarganj might evoke as sculpture, I think I can say that it will be impossible to live with a wife who has her configuration. Nor can we love a woman who has the figure of one of the Yakshis of Mathura except in our very unregenerate moods. Over and above, I shall add an unqualified caveat : Don't, for heaven's sake, try to train your preference in curves by looking at the modern Yakshi on the façade of the Reserve Bank in New Delhi.

Up to this point I have been dealing with linear curves. Though the senses should be trained on them as a pre-

liminary, one must go further, for a woman's body is three-dimensional. So, the final training must be directed on three-dimensional, spheroid, and plastic compositions. These are provided in great abundance and with the necessary frankness by the greatest painting and sculpture. As to the latter, Greek and Renaissance sculpture will serve very well, and in painting I shall recommend the great Italians as well some of the later Baroque masters. I shall not quarrel with anybody if his choice is for the figures of Titian, Tintoretto, Rubens, or even Boucher, but for myself I prefer Botticelli, Leonardo, Raphael, and Giorgione.

I shall recommend two paintings more especially, one for the back view and the other for the front view. The first is the famous Rokeby Venus of Velasquez and the second the Allegory of Venus and Cupid by Bronzino. As so many of our young men are going to England these days there can be no difficulty in seeing them. Both are in the National Gallery in London, the first in Room XVIII (No. 2057) and the second in Room VI (No. 651). These two, only in themselves, can provide a complete course and an unerring guide for the senses. To those young men who cannot go to London I offer to show my large reproductions.

There is, however, one painting which those who know the great creations in the nude would expect me to mention, and which I would certainly have recommended in my young days. But I am puzzled by it now. It is Ingres' *La Source*. Now it appears to me to be a combination of *Amor Sacro* and *Amor Profano*, of Aphrodite Urania and Aphrodite Pandemos, with a good deal of pure geometry thrown in, and I cannot quite decide in my mind what it stands for. But, without any doubt, if her counterpart can be found in any living wife any husband will be lucky beyond his deserts.

I must come now to the last and most important part of the training, that which has to be carried out on the living body. Apropos of this I may say outright that without a rigorous impersonal discipline the mind will go invariably wrong at this stage. All sorts of adventi-



tious attractions like the girl's character, intelligence, education, clothes, father's money, social position are bound to draw a red herring across the true scent of geometry.

Besides, even with a trained geometrical sense, a young man might not know which curves of the body matter most. It might seem from what I have written so far that only those of the face do. But I could not say that, because in love, as between the face and the torso, the ratio of appeal is as one to two, or in simple words the curves of the torso matter more than those of the face. The line of the flanks and the hip is very important, and no one can love a woman without liking her waist line<sup>o</sup> from the backside.

Another backview I find to be decisive. I would say that one of the strongest impulses to love comes from seeing the outline formed by the curve running from the crown of the head down the neck and shoulders to the joints of the arms. Only half the outline, left or right, is enough. Of course, not all the possible shapes of this outline are equally compulsive for all men. But, sooner or later, a man will come upon the outline which is fatal for him. I say fatal advisedly, because after falling in love on the strength of this outline a man may not find the face equally attractive, and in order to continue to love his wife he may never be able to look her in the face. So one has to be wary, but also wise in accepting a compromise over the different curves.

I may be asked : what has all this to do with love? True, I have been appearing so far as an exponent of the abstract aesthetic appeal of curves. But I would answer the question by putting a counter-question. How far is aesthetic experience different from the erotic, using the word in the most exalted sense? The one merges irresistibly in the other in every possible or even impossible circumstance. A great art critic has said that all nude in art is erotic. So it is. Therefore even when contemplating a great re-creation of the natural body in art with aesthetic exultation, you feel you can control yourself no longer and want to cover the ethereal flesh with

kisses from head to foot. That is the supreme achievement of the nude in art. We men are all Pygmalions.

I am sure the clodhoppers will say, and their numbers in this country are legion, all this is very farfetched. It is useless to reply to them. But I will say to all living persons that all experience is one and indivisible. Thus the physical, the mental, the aesthetic, the moral, the intellectual, or the spiritual are at the bottom the same. Only, they do not connect up in the conscious mind. They meet in the subconscious. The true concept of the subconscious self is not that it is the repository of all the primitive urges which we can detect by conscious reasoning, but of all our deepest and most refined urges whose reality only the intuition can feel. Here then both the aesthetic and the erotic meet, and we are liberated from an unnecessary conflict.

This was the piece on the purely geometrical aspect of love which I wrote to warn young people against falling in love without sufficient self-analysis. I would also warn those who are reading it as a mere digression in this book not to treat it lightly, as nothing more than persiflage or whimsy. If they do, they might find their feet caught in the net of 'geometrical love' without being aware of it, and discover afterwards that one cannot live with a wife through a life time on the basis of geometry alone. There are more things in human relations than are dreamt of only in worldly wisdom. Never be ashamed of being 'fanciful'—that gives you a sixth sense.

All this, let me repeat, is a digression to illustrate the point I originally made that if you consider marriage as a rational step in which success or failure can be controlled by reasoning, you had better leave love with a capital 'L' out of your calculation. Certainly, love is the element of supreme happiness in married life, but it cannot be had by making conscious efforts to secure it. Trust rather to your luck or to a kind Providence (if you are religious) for it, and it may follow. I might say that in respect of marriage love is a matter of baffling uncertainty. The Calvinists believe in double predestination : that is to say, in the idea that some people are predestined to salvation,

and others equally predestined to demnation. Contemplating married life in general, both in our country and the West, I have almost come to believe in that sort of predestination—that is, I feel that without any reference to their being lovable and loving in the light of ordinary appearance, some men and women are predestined to have love, and others not to have it at any time in their married life. Recognition of either possibility would save a good deal of self-inflicted unhappiness and frustration.

This does not mean, however, that those who do not and cannot have love in marriage are condemned to an unhappy married life or to an unhappy family life. Marriage is as much a social as a personal affair, and family life is its most important social product. Since I am considering it as a social institution in this chapter I have to consider before everything else in what way marriage can take place that it can ensure a happy family life. For this object what is needed is pleasantness of personal relations in the family, created by affection, understanding, sympathy, and courtesy for one another within it. All these are possible if the members of a family are passably decent and reasonable. But there is the snag. A majority of people appear to be incorrigibly selfish and unreasonable, and this selfishness, combined with the unreasonableness, is most often seen in the key-relationship in a family, that is to say, in the relationship between the husband and the wife. Women will not easily admit that men are at bottom decent, and few men will concede that claim to women in general. That mutual distrust is, unfortunately, the original sin in the most basic human relationship, and seems to be an unavoidable accompaniment to sexual reproduction at the human level. But let us try to master this original propensity to sin.

Nevertheless, this cannot be done, nor can any happy family life brought into existence, if the initial step in the process, i.e. marriage, is wrongly taken, and I must say that marriages as they are brought about in contemporary Hindu society have become a mere commercial transaction, and a degraded commercial transaction at that. That money should enter as a consideration in most marriages

is not something any reasonable and realistic person will or should dispute. For women marriage is a means of living, bare or affluent, and so far as it is that monetary calculations will enter into it. What is wrong is to make it nothing but an affair of money. This is precisely what it has become.

However, the system of arranged marriages has nothing to do with this development. The traditional system of arranged marriages was sound in its way. But it has lost its traditional character and become just trading, selling and buying, on the basis of the hardest bargaining.

The symbol of this degradation of the arranged marriage is the matrimonial advertisement. I shall give an example to show how low it can be. When I published the articles on working women which have been reproduced in the previous chapter, there was a howl of rage, as if I was advocating the selling our young women to perpetual slavery by criticising their efforts to secure economic independence. But they have still to be married with the help of such advertisements as the following :

“Suitable match for convent educated 23 years old, tall (164 cm.), slim, fair, handsome Vaidya, Bengali girl, permanent lecturer, college in Delhi, also proficient in French.”

In what way does this advertisement differ from any in the “Kennel and Livestock” section of the classified advertisements of a newspaper? Even if I could understand the mind of the owner of this daughter-farm and working-girl-breeder, who perhaps in theory professes to be an admirer of Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, I cannot understand the mind of the woman lecturer with a M.A. degree (with French extra) who consented to have such an advertisement put in for herself and allowed herself to be measured for it. Such girls should not boast that they are independent working girls of today, unless they were capable of leaving their father’s roof upon seeing such an advertisement put in without her knowledge.

I have read about the slave markets of Baghdad and Istanbul, where beautiful girls were exposed to sale naked for all their points to be examined properly. But after being

bought some of them had compensation in their status : the mother of the Abbasid Khalif al-Mansur was a Berber slave; al-Mamun's a Persian slave; al-Wathiq's and al-Muhtadi's Greek slaves; al-Mansur's a Greco-Abyssinian; al-Mustain's a Slav; al-Muktafi's as well as al-Muqtadir's Turkish slaves; al-Mustadi's an Armenian slave; and the famous al-Khayzuran, mother of Harun al-Rashid was also a foreign slave. Sold in the slave market, they ended as Empresses. What do these wonderful, independent, and enfranchised Hindu working girls become after being sold in the new slave market? At best wives of petty bureaucrats or uncultured technicians. This is a ludicrous paradox which is possible only in contemporary India.

But even when there are no advertisements of this kind the marriages are sordid scrambles for money. On the part of the girl's father it is wholly that—in the higher ranges of income one pile of money running after another, bribing a possessor of money to give a share of that money to the daughter. On the part of the father of the young man, it cannot be always a hunt for money, for some young men like to have beauty or at least that brand of it which excites sensuality. But here, too, a surprisingly large number of young men are ready to sacrifice even lust to avarice. I constantly hear fathers and mothers boasting that they have married their daughters very well. When I inquire about the criterion by which this is determined I always have the salaries and only the salaries mentioned. In my young days some fathers and mothers talked about the character or talents of the young men, nowadays nobody pays any attention to these things.

The result of marrying the girls only to salaried may be easily imagined. I sometimes say that it is fortunate that in upper-class Hindu society today there are no Vronskys; otherwise, there would have been havoc in the homes of the Hindu Karenins. Thus the Hindu Karenins can keep their Hindu Anna Kareninas, and neither suffering nor revolt is seen among them. But to be frank, there are no Hindu Anna Kareninas either, therefore the peace that obtains is not imposed by male tyranny, it is a concordat.

Still, there may be, and sometimes do arise, a different kind of complication. The daughters of the highly paid members of the salaried class have to be brought up and educated in a meretricious manner in order to make them saleable in their special marriage market. Normally, the piquancy wears off after marriage, but with some of them it becomes more than skin-deep, and is not shed with marriage. With such young women, that is to say with those who do not cease to be *allumeuses* even after marriage, married life becomes a cover for trivial adventures, and if they cannot become Anna Kareninas they at least try to be Madame Bovarys without going so far as suicide.

But, as a rule, this does not happen. The daughters of the salaried fathers become typical wives of salaried husbands, and mothers of plump little boys and girls who look embryonic husbands and wives in the salaried class even from the age of ten. Theirs is a self-sufficient world in which disturbing questions of life and values never arise nor are allowed to arise.

The family life which results from such marriages can only be what they are intended to be, i.e., at its best a business partnership with good relations between the partners. But at its worst it can be very much worse than an unsatisfactory business partnership in which the partners are always cheating one another. After the physical attraction has worn off most husbands and wives feel only a neighbourly interest in each other, and sometimes also neighbourly animosity and hatred. The question of the coalescence of two personalities, which is the best part of married life and which has to be kept living and fresh through continuous renewal of the relationship, never arises. As married life advances it ceases not only to be a marriage of true minds, but even of bodies. In many families the physical revulsion of old husbands and wives from one another shows itself painfully.

In these families there is no family life between the husband and the wife. But that is not the worst thing. In them not even the most important part of family life from the point of view of society, as distinct from that of individuals, that is to say, a common life between the

parents and the children exists, and it is not even missed. In other words, there is no true family life. In terms of functioning, no positive current of values flows from the parents to the children. This is particularly true of the fathers, who do not play any part in the formation of the character and personality of their children at any stage. This happens among people with high as well as low incomes, but for different reasons in the two strata. The low-paid fathers have no time or energy left to attend to their children. It is otherwise with the well-to-do fathers.

The business of highly paid fathers is supposed to be solely the task of supplying money to keep the family going, maintaining its prestige and comforts, often rather tawdry comforts. No further active interest of the father in the family is liked or encouraged. The wife as well as the children even resent the physical presence of the titular master at home. The wives want to pursue their notions of self-importance without sharing it with the husbands. I have often noticed that they speak of *my* house, *my* servants, *my* children, and never of *our* house, *our* servants, *our* children. They seem to deny a role to the husband even in the production of children. The husbands know this and make a pretence of being overburdened with files in the office so as not feel the disgrace of not being welcomed home before eight o'clock. I have recently heard that some of these wives even fell pleased if their husbands have young woman secretaries to detain them in their offices.

In these homes the boys and girls pick up their values from their collective ambience, that is to say, from the cultural community formed by young people of similar ages themselves in the schools and colleges. Furthermore, the system of values of this youthful community is derived neither from the education formally imparted to them nor from the personality of the teachers. The really formative influence on ideas as on clothes is fashion, which in its turn is created either by the films or the cheap press, there being no living world of fashion in India. The parents cannot resist this spontaneous permeation of the minds of their children with notions derived from their special sources of culture. I often hear highly educated and cultured

parents complaining that they cannot make their children give up reading the so-called 'Comics.' 'Why not?'—I ask. But, of course, I know the answer, which I cannot give for fear of wounding them. It is that they are dead as cultural influence.

The hard truth is that the entire system of bringing about marriages has broken down in urban Hindu society. Yet there is no realization of this fact. The old procedure of arranging marriages continues, but the arranged marriage of today is not the arranged marriage of tradition. This form of marriage is undergoing a steady degeneration from decade to decade, so that the old guarantees for a successful marriage are not operative any longer. The traditional method of arranging marriages virtually took no chances about possible and calculable maladjustments, because there always was a fair amount of certainty about the character and personality of the prospective brides and bridegrooms.

The proposals for marriage came or arose through the nexus of blood and marriage relationships. The families marrying into one another were not only well known to one another, they also were almost invariably equal in social and economic status, in birth, and in outlook and habits of life. The basic principle was to judge the fruit on the known properties of the tree : "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit," as the Sermon on the Mount preached. So one would marry only into families which were known to be culturally compatible and whose moral reputation stood high. In my young days I heard caution being given not only against certain families, but even against certain villages or districts : namely, that girls from a certain village were generally idle or fast.

This method certainly neglected to look into the individual traits of the young men and girls, but that was not a very serious matter, because traditional Hindu life neither fostered nor set great store by pronounced individuality. Most of the young people were cast in a common mould. So, if allowances were made for occasional exceptions and for the normal incidence of black sheep, no serious clashes



of character and temperament arose, and on the whole a happy or at least contented married life was assured. Moreover, the marriages were mostly early, and thus they made adaptation from one style of living to another easy. It was sometimes said to a young man who was not quite satisfied as to the smartness of his future bride, that he could always remould her according to his standards. I have myself seen many girls making the passage from a traditional life to a Westernized style of living very easily.

But these substantial safeguards for arranged marriages no longer exist, or exist only very exiguously. These marriages take place most often between families unknown to one another, who become acquainted with one another *ad hoc*, i.e., for the purpose of the marriage. This at once puts the families on their best behaviour, and not infrequently tempts them to a pretence of superior behaviour. Information can be obtained only on the economic status of the families, and often even this is not wholly reliable. If the young man is holding a salaried post, private inquiry is made in the offices, and sometimes it is discovered that while his father has given the maximum of the scale, he is perhaps at its bottom or one two annual increments higher up. If, however, the families are in business or independent professions no correct assessment of the income is possible, though I know that at times bank clerks are bribed to disclose confidential information about a current or a fixed deposit account. As to mental qualifications, they are often not taken into account at all, or judged only by appearance. Character is taken on trust, and the trust is as likely as not misplaced. Thus the arranged marriages are very often a sort of gamble, and the higher the stake the greater is the chance of losses. Just consider what business would be if it were all speculation. But most arranged marriages today are very speculative business transactions, in respect of personal relations even when not in respect of money.

Yet Hindu society will not take the only step which will rescue marriages in it from this uncertainty. The time has come when it should be recognized that the contemporary method of arranging marriages has to be rejected lock,

stock, and barrel. It cannot be reformed either by reverting to its old form or by introducing modifying features. There should be no hesitancy about the alternative either, which is to bring about marriages by fostering acquaintance between the young people in the first instance, and then between their families. No young man or young woman can marry or even decide wisely about marriage without meeting an assorted number of young men or women. I shall probably be accused of advocating free love or at least unrestricted flirtation. Not at all. I remember the wise words of Anthony Trollope : "It is my belief that few young men settle themselves down to the work of the world, to the begetting of children, and carving and paying and struggling and fretting for the same, without having first been in love with four or five possible mothers for them, and probably with two or three at the same time. And yet these men are, as a rule, worthy of the excellent wives that ultimately fall to their lot." I would only add the rider, which was not thought of in Victorian times, that a young girl, too, might do the same thing.

Though I believe in love at first and even in its survival, I have already said that I would not make it the primary thing in a marriage. The most important thing for young men and young women is to know one another, to find out whether they feel drawn to one another, and then to learn to respect one another. Without love in the more restricted sense there can be very happy marriages, but without respect and affection there can be none. This is recognized as much in the European world, where love is assumed to be the highest basis of marriage, as it ought to be here. I quote Jane Austen's comment on the change of sentiment in Elizabeth Bennet, who was veering round from her prejudice against Darcy to an incipient feeling of love, but love based on judgement : "She began now to comprehend that he was exactly the man, who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her. His understanding and temper, though unlike her own, would have answered all her wishes. It was an union that must have been to the advantage of both; by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manners improved, and from

his judgement, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefits of greater importance." This would sound cool to ardent temperaments. But in marriage cool judgement resulting in attraction and affection is often preferable to what is too readily called love.

But it is always the opportunities for forming cool judgements, for opening up possibilities of attraction and affection, which are lacking in our society. Most fathers and mothers seem to hold the view that any social mixing between young people will lead to promiscuity. Yet none of the fathers, and more surprisingly the mothers, seem to be aware of what their sons and daughters, and especially the daughters, do when they go out of their homes for work, study, shopping, or visiting. These respites from the usually stupid and unreasonable parental surveillance are often put to good use to make up for the unnatural starvation enforced at home. All sorts of crude and casual sexual relationships are formed and they may range from calf-love to commitments which result in recourse to abortion. The cult of the boy or girl friend is perhaps the most inane and innocent of these liaisons.

One day I was taken out for a visit to a very high-placed person in New Delhi by a young man in his large car. On the way back, late in the evening, he picked a young girl, who, I was told, was a college student and was staying in a hostel. She sat by his side as he drove, and kept on kissing him all the time. Of course, I know now that they did not marry afterwards. I also see young people in the parks who are obviously enjoying each other's society secretly and with a consciousness of guilt. The parents generally remain ignorant of these goings on, but some times they also turn a blind eye for fear of being faced with a *fait accompli* in the way of scandal. In Hindu society, so long as appearances are saved, nothing is wrong.

What the parents will not do is to be sane and sensible. They will not allow young men and women to meet one another openly in the homes. I know that some parents who put in advertisements to marry their modern daughters do say to them that if they wanted to marry for love there would not be any objection. But they will not create the

social life which can make falling in love possible. Even the ancient Hindu *svayam-vara* had to be arranged by the fathers, and the modern falling in love needs extremely elaborate but discreet organization behind the scenes, as I have already explained.

I would say that if our social life was developed to a point at which there would be full opportunities for young people to meet and know one another, that would help even arranged marriages of a more sound type. The fathers and mothers could themselves judge young men and women, and if they felt satisfied they could send formal proposals to the respective parents. So, probably with a more extended social life permitting the meeting of both the sexes, we could make the best of both worlds.

Looked at from the point of view of the young men and women themselves, the unnatural segregation is the most cruel and frustrating thing in contemporary Hindu society. This starvation of natural cravings results either in a deadening of the sensibilities, or in continuous suffering, or in a wild and perverted breaking out. For a time those who never get any opportunity to meet a person of the opposite sex remain in a state of continuous sensual excitement. This is particularly the case with young men from the poor section of the middle-class. They are cruelly exposed to the piquancy of the modern girls of the wealthy stratum, and for their hopeless aspirations they seek a vicarious outlet by writing slogans on the walls of women's colleges. Some days ago I noticed these inscriptions : "*Tom aurat nahin, lekin roti-bananewali mashin,*" and "Bourgeois marriage is legalized prostitution." These young men turn Communist, or Socialist under the mistaken notion that in a Communist or Socialist order these titillating girls will be theirs for the nonce, offering endless variety. They even think that democracy is also a means to that end. There is very little realization among those who are studying contemporary political movements in India that Communism and democracy in young people here are largely an expression of unsatisfied rut. The only way to cure this is to reform our social life with an eye to marriage.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *The Unitary Family*

At last I can deal with the unitary family, which in my view is the only genuine family. But what I have to say on it will appeal only to those who believe in the family, that is, in its significance, necessity, and importance. Plato as theorist did not. But even in theory he only wanted the family to be done away with for his elite, the so-called Guards, and not for the mass of the working population. But, of course, this rejection of the family was thoroughly utopian, and it was a product of his political idealism with its almost mystical adoration of the community. He thought that the creators and defenders of an ideal state could not afford to commit themselves to wives and children. The prescription remained wholly theoretical.

Christianity, however, did more, it succeeded in partially destroying the family for the sake of its highest ideal and in the light of its peculiar world-view by imposing celibacy on the elite which was to preach and realize this ideal, namely, the clergy. It preached that the world was partly imperfect and partly evil and in any way passing, and that eternal and perfect life was only to be found in the kingdom of heaven, into which men would pass after resurrection, and in resurrection there was no marrying or giving in marriage. So, those who were to preach this message of Christianity could not marry, and had to be like angels in heaven. That was the basis of the obligation of celibacy imposed

on the Christian priest. But even among Christians celibacy for the priests has been rejected by the Protestants, and it is being questioned in the Catholic Church as well.

Hinduism, in contrast, has imposed married and family life as an obligation arising out of the concept of *Dharma*. In *Grihastashram* there could be no repudiation of it even for an alternative ideal. So no Hindu can or should deny the value of family. Yet it is curious that even those Hindus who live in a joint family without rebelling but always complaining, or have a family of the unitary pattern which does not function properly, raise their hackles if anybody points to them the absence of true family feeling in unitary Hindu families so far as they exist. At once a far-reaching eschatological wrangle is started, and it is argued that in the modern world as it is shaping, the family has no place or will have no place, because the coming age is going to be the age of the collective and not the individual man, and thus the family is going to be supplanted by the community. This sort of argument comes partly from chauvinism which refuses to admit any shortcoming in our contemporary life, and partly from the habit of justifying practical failures by pretentious theories.

I have seen the Kibbutz in Israel, and I have an idea of what a small collective community can do in the way of superseding the traditional family, or to be more accurate in taking away the burden of the children from the parents, who continue to live together as husband and wife. But I have also seen that even this kind of upbringing in a Kibbutz does not destroy family feeling or the instinct for it among those whose childhood was spent in them. An Israeli friend of mine, who grew up to manhood in a Kibbutz, is an exemplary family man. So it might be said that the collective man who will neither need nor tolerate a family is no immediate historical possibility. Among us he is the hypothetical justification for all our failures in conducting family life soundly.

But all this eschatological disputation is just sophistry. In fact, nobody in India has been able to dispense with the family and home even for giving education in the narrowest sense, that is, imparting book knowledge, which should

be the specific job of the schools. It is notorious that Indian schools do not teach at all or teach so inefficiently that the really effective teaching has to be given at home through private tuition. In this country those who cannot afford this private tuition hardly get any instruction at all. All parents know the amount of home work inflicted on even children and all of it has to be supervised either by them or by private tutors. So if the family has not become superfluous even for schooling, the time when it will be obsolete for training character, imparting culture, and forming personality can hardly be anticipated even by imagination.

Everywhere the family has been the formative cell for continuing and perpetuating the way of life of a civilized society, for initiating its youth in its culture, for safeguarding its system of values, and nowhere in the world has there been any effective substitute for it. All societies have their specific emphasis in culture, the Germans, instance, set special store by music, and here is a passage from the autobiography of Wagner in which he describes the result of this emphasis in German family life.

“Go and listen one winter’s night in that little cabin; there sit a father and his three sons; at a small round table; two play the violin, a third the viola, the father the ‘cello; what you hear so lovingly and deeply played is a quartet composed by that little man who is beating time. He is the schoolmaster from the neighbouring hamlet, and the quartet he has composed is a lovely work of art and feeling. Again I say, go to that spot, and hear that author’s music played, and you will be dissolved in tears; for it will search your heart, and you will know what German music is, will feel what is the German spirit.”

Wagner was in no way romancing, or even idealizing. Max Mueller as a schoolboy was staying at Leipzig in the house of a professor, Professor Carus. It was a musical house, in which the professor played the violin, and his wife sang. In addition, many musical geniuses, including Mendelssohn, came there and played at the evening parties.

The dominant note in the English country gentleman’s house was, on the other hand, religion, and here is a beautiful

description of the inculcation of the religious spirit from Percy Lubbock's book *Earlham* :

"The hall was broad and square, rather bare of furniture; against the walls there were seats, velveteed and fringed, once of a strong old crimson, but now faded away into soft rose-leaf colours under the suns of many summers; there was a round table, where our grandfather sat with his large Bible. . . .

"Prayers began with an unaccompanied hymn. Our grandmother, standing before the wide chimney, struck into the first notes, with a little toss of her lace-capped head—lifted up her singularly sweet and resonant voice, and the rest of us followed in unison.

"Meanwhile our grandfather sat at his round table, one hand propping the bald dome of his forehead, the other arm embracing the big Bible that lay before him.

"He took no part in the hymn, he waited; and when we were seated he read the chapter over which he had been brooding. . . . Presently the arm that embraced the Bible began slowly, slowly to close it, and the exposition was at an end, and we knelt. . . .

"Our grandfather, fervently, appealingly, lyrically, delivered a long improvisation of prayer."

There are many accounts in the autobiographies and memoirs of well known figures in every walk of life of the influence of the home and family on their education. I give only one example. H.A.L. Fisher, the distinguished English historian and Liberal politician, wrote of his mother, who was a beauty and saint at the same time that "she was not and made no pretence to be an intellectual, and of education she had received only what was usual with young gentlewomen of her time. Yet she looked after the education of her eleven children, upon each of whom she showered an unforgettable treasury of affection and solicitude." Fisher adds : "She was my first teacher and my best. I still recall the eager animation of her little classes held round the nursery table. Delight in learning came to me from her."

It was the recognition of the family as the smallest and at the same time the most efficient natural social unit for maintaining a civilized existence, that made Burke assimi-



late the spirit of English political life and institutions, to the tradition of English family life. He believed in the organic growth of political institutions, and was very distrustful of going wholly by rational theorizing. Therefore he declared that the English people had preserved the method of nature in their conduct of the state in a spirit of philosophic analogy, and went on to say : "We have given to our frame of polity the image of a relation in blood; binding up the constitution of our country with our dearest domestic ties; adopting our fundamental laws into the bosom of our family affections; keeping inseparable, and cherishing with the warmth of all their combined and mutually reflected charities, our state, our hearths, our sepulchres, and our altars."

I do not think any higher tribute could be paid to family life, and this tribute would not have been paid if the quality of family life as lived by the English people had not been such as to create its *mystique*. Certainly, family life is no longer what it was among them, and there is no doubt either that with the atrophy of the educating function of the family and of the loyalties that were created by it, a large portion of the youth of England is relapsing into barbarism.

But if the family is to perform its civilizing function it must make itself an active and assertive psychological environment whose impact no member of the family will be able to resist. This environment is a peculiar and complex thing, both personal and impersonal. It will not be found where all the members of a family or even a single member does not have vitality, but it is not just the sum total of the vitality of the several members: some of the personal vitality seems to spread out to form an impersonal ambience whose presence or absence is felt as soon as one goes into a home. At times even one person of exceptional vitality can energize a whole home, and in such cases he is always called the soul of the family.

It follows from this that life is the first quality a good family must have, and life here means vital energy and animation. Its gamut may be wide, ranging from quiet cheerfulness to exuberant high spirits, and varied levels of liveliness in a single family are always preferable to a forced

uniform level, high, low, or medium. So people who are by nature quiet (which is quite a different thing from being glum) must learn not only to tolerate but also to enjoy spirited behaviour, and those who are vivacious must not be contemptuous of those who do not exhibit the same warmth or effervescence. But at both ends the living quality of a family can always be distinguished from stolidity at one extreme and horseplay at the other.

However, it is this precise quality of being living that is absent in most Hindu homes and families. I have always wondered how a set of people who cannot sit for one minute without an electric fan flopping overhead and keeping a blast of hot or cold air playing round their plump bodies to radiate the internal heat generated by their unbalanced metabolism, or in other words who are like internal combustion engines which will burn up without water or air cooling, can yet live without minding it in a breezeless mental atmosphere. Most Indian homes are stagnant, stuffy, or even stifling in their psychological staticity, and for this reason if a member of the family happens to possess a lively spirit he is driven out from the home to show it in places which cannot be civilized in its expression. The wet blanket is thrown about so relentlessly at home that few persons treat it as anything but a lair to sleep or an eating house which supplies such bad food that good living has become identified with frequenting meretricious restaurants, where cuisine is never looked upon as the first attraction.

How to bring life into a family when and where it is not present is too large a question for me to try to deal with it here. It is part of the larger question, the basic question, raised in the title of this book. That is equivalent to saying that a man or a woman who has not tackled the larger question successfully will not also succeed in handling the smaller. At both levels, however, the outcome depends on the will to live, which also creates zest in living. These depend on the vitality a person is born with, but a good deal can be done to supplement any congenital deficiency and also to develop innate vitality by living soundly. Nutrition is part of sound living, so is self-restraint which prevents us from wasting our vital powers. I have observed that in most

cases the observed lack of vitality in India is brought by self-indulgence, that is, surrender to propensities which eat into both physical and mental powers. Apart from that it is the product of gross negligence about the physical basis of life. In the course of my long life I have discovered that faith in life and optimism without which one can never be happy are products of sound and robust health.

This is a basic problem which can be solved only by taking basic measures, which many people do not take because they think living can be taken for granted and can take care of itself. But on a secondary plane a good deal can be done to bring life into daily living by acquiring interests, and this acquisition of interests is the second requirement for a good family life. A family whose members do not possess keen interests will never be a happy family. But I must point out that vitality and interest are interconnected. That is, without vitality no one can have interests, and without interests vitality will not be sustained. In their insufficiency or absence they create a vicious circle. That is to say, weakness in vitality make interests anaemic, and absence of interests gives a feeling of inadequate vitality. This vicious circle must be broken where it presents its easiest breaching point without considering their logical order. Lack of resolution in this matter can only deprive us of both vitality and interests.

These disinterested interests can be called recreation in its proper sense : that is, activities which bring pleasure or happiness by making us go through experiences which are valuable as experiences without any reference to their results. Material gain should be the last thing to become involved in these interests, or rather it should not come in at all. Recreation by pursuing interests which are not connected with acquisition of material prosperity is the employment of leisure to its best purpose, which without it would be mental vacuum and a source of boredom.

Now, I have noticed that the absence of interests, and the boredom which results from this, are the greatest defects of our family and personal life. I have always been dismayed by the indifference to hobbies shown by my countrymen. Actually, many parents consider them to be moral delin-

quency in their children, and never allow them to have them when the children are obedient. I have never felt happy when I have not been able to acquire a new hobby every five years, and in my hard days I did not mind my poverty overmuch as a major trial in life, but as a minor one in depriving me of hobbies. At the end of life, however, I have a sufficient number of hobbies to keep me busy all the time, because in acquiring a new hobby I never give up any old one. In fact, I have succeeded in converting my means of livelihood into a hobby, or to be more accurate, I have converted the hobby of writing into a means of livelihood. I remember that when I was in Government service and yet writing for various magazines, the question of its permissibility arose, and my well-wishers in the office gave me an opportunity to get out of the scrape by answering their leading question with an affirmative : "Does Mr. Chaudhuri contribute articles to papers as a hobby?" Had I said I was doing that as a vocation I should certainly have been in trouble. But what a fun it is to have merged vocation and hobby! It has made me happy.

In the case of children I must give the warning that to deprive them of hobbies which are expressions of their interests, is not only to make them unhappy in their family life, but to encourage the worst kind of indiscipline. The revolt of the youth in India begins with the suppression of their interests in early childhood.

But the cultivation of the highest type of personal interest in the home not only makes for happiness in family life, and provides the most dependable and lasting happiness for its members, it also fulfils the highest end for which a family exists, which I have defined as maintenance of civilized life. No civilization can exist without a deep interest in things of the mind, for instance, in literature, art, and music; and habit of reading, listening to music, or looking at works of art is never formed unless encouraged and fostered in the family from early life in the children. It is in very exceptional cases that young people acquire the habit of continuous reading when they do not see their parents reading. In English society in its most cultured days parents not only read by themselves, they also read to each other.

For example, the historian G.M. Trevelyan writes about his parents : "How many hours in the course of sixty years he spent in reading to her aloud! It seemed as if all that was best in English prose and poetry had been composed for their joint delight." I acquired my love of reading from my father and also from my mother, both of whom I saw reading. My father, in addition, read aloud to us both poetry and prose. My sons, too, felt inclined to read, not by seeing me studying, but by seeing me reading most of the time for pleasure.

But Indian parents normally do not encourage, or for that matter even tolerate, recreational reading in their children. They want their children to read, but only text-books. The mothers, more especially, have an unerring instinct for detecting, with one look at a book from a distance, whether or not it is capable of bringing money into the family as a link in the long chain of training given to earn it. Reading for any other purpose is looked upon as dissipation. A sister-in-law of mine who never liked books or reading once saw my young sons reading, and reading books which were not school-books. She observed in a scandalized tone to my wife : "He has already made them book-addicts." In her eyes I was an old and irredeemable sinner. As a result of the suppression of reading for pleasure, I have found that some girls, not allowed to read novels, read them in the w.c., pleading constipation for remaining there so long.

Early introduction is even more necessary in respect of music and art. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to acquire a taste for artistic expression and the capacity to enjoy it without beginning very early. More especially, is this true of music. Nobody can fully enjoy music, an art which can provide a deep spiritual experience and not merely pleasurable physiological sensation, without becoming familiar with it from early childhood. Here, too, I shall give a personal example. I learned to love music because I always heard my mother singing, sometimes accompanying herself and at others accompanied by my father. Often I was awakened as a child by the treble voice of my mother singing a religious song in *Lalit* at dawn.

Later in life I went for European music, and as a result my children began to hear the best Western music on the gramophone as babies. Thus they acquired a feeling for that music much more easily than I did, and as boys they also learned to play European instruments. Thus when my sons were living with me and their mother, the happiest feature of our home life was the playing of trios on the violin, piano, and viola in the evenings. Now the interest has passed to the fourth generation in my little granddaughter. She is only two and a half years old, but she already orders Mozart and Beethoven to be played to her on the gramophone. She surprises us by asking quite unprompted for the *Missa Solennis* of Beethoven or the air of the Queen of the Night from *Magic Flute*, and in her more frivolous moods for a waltz by Johann Strauss. And she has never been forced. It is wholly spontaneous.

I do not give my family history in a spirit of bragging. I do so only to give a few concrete instances to bring home my point that interests actively pursued make for a happy and joyous family life. It is the failure to provide these interests that drives the young people from home, and creates the habit of loafing in the streets and bazars with cronies, which works havoc with home life. My parents permitted us, brothers and sisters, to stage plays with our friends at home even at some considerable expense. This has made me think that participative entertainment at home is in every case preferable to ready-made mass entertainment.

The third feature every good family must have, and without which it might be described only as a boarding house, is a positive and dominant tone, perceptible as well as communicable. This simple word has many meanings, and even the sense in which it is used here is a complex notion. The tone of a family is made up by a number of strands, e.g., its moral, intellectual, aesthetic, emotional, and spiritual traits, and though it can always be felt, it cannot be easily defined in terms of the intellect. This would be obvious from the following definition given by Webster's dictionary :

“General or prevailing trend, character, or quality of morals, breeding, behaviour, or the like, particular tenor, spirit or tendency.”

That, one would say, is fairly comprehensive and yet vague at the edges. Tone might be described as the character associated with a particular thing, in this instance, a family, as its inner spirit rather than with the impression it produces on others, which is the atmosphere. But the tone of a family can be imparted as well as acquired, and it can also exert an influence on those who come in contact with it.

Not all families will have one tone, some may have a dominantly religious, some a political, some a literary and artistic, and some even a sporting tone. The dominant interest of a family creates the impression of its tone. Moreover, a family may have its tone composed of many strands. But what never makes for a family, in any case, a happy family is the presence of clashing or discordant tones in it. I hold very strongly that no family can exert its full influence if two opposed tones are working in it. I am afraid I have to recommend a good deal of intolerance of discordant tones to the head of a family if he takes his family life seriously. It is disastrous to permit tones of different orders to exist side by side in a family. It becomes impossible then to give cultural and moral integrity to the children. Let me particularize :

If, for instance, the head of a family loves good literature he should not allow his children to read comics. Here the question of respecting different tastes does not arise. Again, if the husband loves classical Indian or serious European music and the wife pop music and Hindi film songs the sooner they separate the better for them. A man who is truly religious cannot allow the many forms of superstition in which religion is found at certain levels of society or culture. There are things which cannot be reconciled, and to give two more instances they are these : a husband who loves home life and a wife who is an incorrigible gad-out, or a husband who is mean in money matters and wife who is generous. Serious moral antagonism, of course, totally destroys families.

Here, however, I have to answer one objection. It can

be said that the view I put forward is very dogmatic, because inclinations and tastes may differ, and it would be very tyrannical to coerce the other members of a family in the light of one set of values or one value. That is, however, beside the point. I would not have recommended intolerance if the husband was fond of study and the wife inclined to philanthropy. These are inclinations of different kinds but existing at the same level of quality. What cannot live together are preferences at different qualitative levels of mental life.

This is a democratic age and it has created the notion that all likes and inclinations are equally valid and no one has the right to question somebody else's preferences in the light of his own. This would put an end to all standards, for an evaluative judgement of quality is essential for maintaining civilization. But I have found that in a family which possesses a dominant tone the question of coercing any member does not arise at all. All grow into the system of values prevailing in the family. The clashes over standards which are seen in Indian families are due to the absence of any tone. I do not say that all Indian families are without a tone, but a large number of them are.

The tone of a family is controlled by the tastes of its members, and tastes may differ. If they did not we should not have heard the saying : There's no accounting for tastes. But here the word taste is used in its rough wide meaning, namely, any liking or inclination. But in cultural history the word is never used without a connotation which implies judgement. In that context taste means the power of discerning and appreciating fitness, beauty, order, congruity, proportion, or symmetry, or whatever constitutes excellence. As Hazlitt put it : "Taste is nothing but sensibility to the differing degrees and kinds of excellence in the works of art or Nature." Taste in this sense is not commonly found in Indian society, not is it inculcated in education. Therefore it is the family which must take care of taste. If it did, the family would have done a good deal for modern Indian culture. Taste and cultural creation are closely related. There is no decline of culture without a parallel decline of taste. Most Indian families are uncultured



because they are without taste, and they do not have good taste because they have no culture.

I shall now turn to the functioning of the family as a civilizing influence and agency. It cannot perform its function if it is not harmonious, and as a result sound. "All happy families," said Tolstoy, "resemble each other, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." This is analogous to the fact that the result of a mathematical sum when correct will never be found to be different with different persons, but inaccurate results never agree. The impression of similarity is created by the harmonious working of families, and not necessarily by what comes out of the working. But nothing can come out without harmonious working. It is this problem which I have to consider now. In India it is no easy problem.

A family is a natural social grouping based on two biological attractions: one of which operates between the sexes and other between the parent and the young. Both the associations as they exist in the animal world are for the most part temporary, and they are also sustained instinctively. In short, in a manner of speaking, they are automotive, which they cannot be among human beings. For one thing, the association in its human form is permanent or at least long-lasting, and it cannot be continued except as a soulless living together without conscious maintenance and renovation. Only too many people assume that simply because marriage has created a family and produced children by bringing a man and a woman together, it will remain a family in a true sense without further effort. You might as well expect a motor-car to go on giving good service without maintenance. Actually, the task is more continuous than motor-car maintenance. To send off a wife to her father's house, as it is customary to do in Hindu society, may be like sending a car for periodic overhaul to a garage, but to live with her calls for a different kind of attention, which, to continue the analogy of the car, is like providing cooling and lubrication all the time the engine is running. Try to run it without these, and it will not be long before it disintegrates. But we try to run the family engine without its cooling and lubrication.

Any continuing association like a family even though helped by the natural affections like those which come into being when people marry and have children, calls for a good deal of robustness on the one hand, and sympathy, kindness, and tolerance on the other. It makes unceasing demands on our mental resources. This is very often felt as a strain, and the strain breaks out in snappy behaviour, which is the worst thing that can be seen in family life. Perhaps it can never be done away with, but not to make it an exception, and for that matter a rare exception, is to give the family a chronic ailment, its dyspepsia though perhaps not its cholera. I would rather die of family cholera, which is divorce, than have its dyspepsia, which is bickering.

Of course, it is the head of family, the husband and father who has to bear most of this burden. In fact, in a good family he is much more. No family can run satisfactorily as a whole and for its individual members unless its head is a strong personality and an active moral, intellectual, and emotional force in it. He does have to be fussy or loud to play that part. Most often his directing, controlling, and shaping influence is felt rather than seen or heard in its exercise. In point of fact, when its head has to throw his weight about a family becomes like a government which has to maintain law and order by making continuous use of the armed police, the gas squad, and even the army. It does not always follow that a man who is a strong personality in his vocation or in public life will necessarily be a force in his family. It needs a special canalization of the power of a personality to make it effective in a family. To be a hero in one's family is more difficult than even becoming a hero to one's valet.

Next to the husband-and-father comes the wife-and-mother as the decisive influence on the family in shaping its daily and general life as well as its spirit and atmosphere. If anything, from the point of view of execution, the woman is the more important personal factor, because she can make or mar the role of the man. Even the best of h-and-fs will be nullified by a bad w-and-m. Think of a commander-in-chief whose commanders in the field are incompetent, unsympathetic, or disobedient. For the husband, the wife

is both the Chief-of-Staff and commander in the field. The family is under the rule of a dual Divinity like the Vedic Mitra-Varunau, who are always mentioned together in the *dvi-vachan* or dual number in Sanskrit. In their highest functioning the father and mother are not called *Pita* and *Mata*, but *Pitarau*, again in the dual, as also in Parvati-Parameshvarau. Note that Parvati is put first, and not for the sake of euphony alone.

Thus if the h-and-f is not up to the mark the w-and-m can always compensate, and becomes more important still. This was the opinion of Mr. Micawbar who was no ideal head of family :

“My dear friend Copperfield,” said Mr. Micawbar, “accidents will occur in the best-regulated families; and in families not regulated by that pervading influence which sanctifies while it enhances the—a—I would say, in short, by the influence of Woman, in the lofty character of Wife, they may be expected with confidence, and must be borne with philosophy.”

All this is very general and as it were understood. It would not have borne repetition unless there was some concrete situation to give it point and relevance, in which there was some special deficiency. That deficiency exists in our society. In it neither the father nor the mother realizes the gravity of their function. If the family, as Santayana said, is one of Nature's masterpieces, the men and women here do their utmost to ruin it by human mishandling.

The normal Indian father, as I am never tired of saying, is so absorbed in earning a bare livelihood or in pursuing his worldly ambitions, particularly in getting more and more money, that he never can and never does take his duty towards his family seriously. I will never admit that this is compulsive even at the subsistence level. For both the poor and the rich father the submission to money which is so universal is what we Hindus call a *tamasik* fault, it is cowardice at the lower level and sordid at the higher. The mother, on her part, neglects the family for two reasons. She either becomes a slave to domestic drudgery and sinks to the level of a servant, making the home her workhouse, as Bernard Shaw said, or she becomes a butterfly who hates

the very idea of family responsibility. The negligent mistress is partly driven to this attitude by seeing the lot of the traditional housewife in Hindu society, but also through her own frivolity. Anyway, between them, the husband and wife often succeed in not only eliminating the higher values of family life but even in putting the family out of order as a machine for organizing a smooth and pleasant daily life, which is the indispensable basis of any kind of higher life.

It has always surprised me to find how few Indian husbands and wives are capable of taking a commonsense view of this fundamental thing, this business of running the house and family by means of a rational division of labour. The man makes a contribution to it by earning money, by financing it, and the woman by being the working or managing partner. The man in India normally takes his obligation for granted, though when not sustained or incited by love of money he also grumbles about it. But the woman is never reconciled to the corresponding burden which she has to bear, namely, running the house. If she is compelled to work in the house for want of sufficient means she complains bitterly about it, calling it slavery to the husband. In well-to-do families even supervision of the work of the servants is resented as the same slavery. Nearly all women take the view that any kind of responsibility for the proper management of the home is exploitation of the woman by the man.

But why? I have never been able to understand the assumption about life which stands behind that attitude. All living beings are compelled to work to keep alive, and sex makes no difference to it. The tiger and the tigress both hunt. The obligation is equally binding on man. But in human society there has been a difference. In the higher strata of society the man has taken off the women the most unpleasant and onerous part of living, namely earning a livelihood. In return, the woman has been given the task of looking after the home. This is a rational division of labour which works, not in favour of the husband, but in favour of the wife. Yet the woman resents it. This, to my mind, is sheer perversity,—an unreasonable refusal to

do one's bit for surviving.

Most women would not understand it if the husband were to say : Look here, I slave in the office for seven hours and am bullied or insulted by people I do not respect, and I go through all that without making a grievance of it. Why can you not do a little routine work at home, even if you call it drudgery, for the sake of your husband and children? Why do you think that you are exempt from the compulsion of doing something?

I am afraid somewhere at the bottom of their minds lurks the assumption that it is enough that they are providing physical satisfaction to their husbands, and that entitles them to live without working. But the answer suggested by common sense would be that the physical satisfaction is two-sided, unless, of course, the wife thinks that the satisfaction can come only from the husband's friends and not from the husband. Even in the latter case, she should be grateful to the husband for providing the friends. The husband, if he was naughty, could even say that if physical satisfaction was the only thing that was involved in the relationship between the husband and the wife, there was no sense in getting it by undertaking the unlimited liability and often the costly liability of maintaining a wife through her life, when it could be had on a limited and fixed liability basis elsewhere. I hold the view that if according to modern notions men and women have to be equal in all respects the women must not claim equality in pleasures alone; there must be equality also in bearing the burdens of life.

This reluctance of the wife to do her share of work for the family has a curious backwash on the lifework of the husband if he has a sense of vocation. It is common experience in our society that wives prefer the husband to do some routine work at a desk, and not devote himself to any creative work. In fact, the wives have a positive dislike for any sense of vocation in their husbands, as if it were a rival, and as a rival it is taken. This is a basical jealousy, which if it exists cannot be easily got rid of. But, over and above, there is also another calculation. In routine jobs the husband is usually out of the way for the greater

part of the day, and he becomes so used to it that he does not demand attention when he is at home. It is common knowledge that most desk-job holders carry their files home, and deal with them there, which gives greater freedom to the wife. Apart from that, there is also another consideration. If a husband devotes himself to creative work he is bound to demand more attention and in any case good food. That is looked upon as very unreasonable in a husband. If he is indeed to set up a rival in the home, she must not be expected to nourish that rival by doing everything possible to strengthen its hold on the husband.

If I might be personal on this point, I would say that any success I have had as a writer has been made possible by the fact that my wife has not taken the usual view about a husband who tries to do some creative work. As I have written in my autobiography: "She has organized and sustained a balanced regime for me and kept me on an even keel amidst the many torments and not fewer inconveniences of present-day living. Those who know that it means in these days to provide a husband with good food and similar amenities of life, and how necessary and yet how impossible it is for a man to ride on an even keel in the contemporary world, will understand my gratitude to my wife." Yet all my woman relatives and many of her woman friends say that she is submitting to my tyranny, adding that they would never have pampered me in all my unreasonable caprices, which includes any necessity I might have for nutrition. If any reader is getting any pleasure out of this book he or she should remember that most of it comes from a proper division of labour at home, and the wives who will be angered by my remarks should bear in mind that the courage to offend them also comes from the same division of labour, which has prevented the appearance of my greatest enemy in my own home.

The simple truth is that all the higher aims of family life can be realized if only there is agreement on the fundamental end, and on a rational division of labour in regard to that fundamental purpose. Happiness in family life is, so to speak, a surplus-value, added to its use-value. There can be no happy family life for those who shirk its burdens.

In dealing with family life in this book I have not been concerned with the intimate personal relations between the couple which form the strongest bond for a family, and without which even the other strong bond, attachment between parents and children, gets little opportunity to develop, though in many places I have hinted at what these relations might be. The highest type of family can never exist without deep and lasting love between husband and wife. But given the system of marriage described in the last chapter, this kind of love is bound to be a rarity in our life. Even if it appears at the beginning of married life, it soon withers to give place to a cold association, in which elderly husbands and wives are more or less indifferent to each other. In a word, they live in physical but not in mental contact.

This is tragic, and all the more tragic because the absence of love is not felt as unnatural. There is no ache even for love, that love which has not come or has withered. Nonetheless, there is also another tragedy which is not felt as such because its deep pain is smothered by irritation. That sort of family tragedy is seen when even outward good manners are not shown by the members of family towards one another, and more especially by the wife towards the husband and there are continuous bickerings. Formerly, it was the husband who was the tyrant, in these days it is more normally the wife. Hindu wives did, of course, always wield enormous power in the family even when they had none legally. It has now degenerated into a nagging tyranny of the wives. In the upper-classes this is much more common than in the lower, and at the topmost level of Indian society most wives stand on their husbands like Mother Kali on the prostrate Shiva. Nowhere else is woman more feared as Shakti. This spectacle does not inspire love or respect for family life except when in youth the family is seen to be the only respectable basis for sexual life. But even sexual life is trying to become independent of the family. So on what will the family rest?

Not certainly on the tie between the parents in the children. If anything, in India today, these relations are even more unsatisfactory than those between the husband

and the wife. The maladjustment between the two generations is growing at an alarming rate. The unrest among the youth which is now seen all over the country and which has become a feature of educational and political life, has begun, like charity, at home. It is the rebelliousness in the family which is spilling out into a wider field. The difference is that the rebellion in the family, though complete, does not need to be active because the parents have accepted it.

For this I make the parents primarily responsible. By their conduct they are actively driving their children to revolt. I do not say that the manner of the revolt or its ostensible objects as declared by the young people are right. But the revolt itself is natural. It arises out of the failure of the parents to give the highest kind of lead to their children. If in the case of husband and wife, I have emphasized the maladjustment at its practical and matter of fact level, in the case of the parents and the children I have to draw attention to the highest aspect.

I have already discussed the unhealthy character of the monetary relations between parents and children, both sons and daughters. In themselves these relations are bad, but in their prospective form too, that is to say, when the parents only have monetary expectations from their children after they have grown up, they harm the family spirit when it needs to be at its best in order to form the character and outlook of the children. The worldly expectations of the parents are always impinging on the minds on the the children both consciously and unconsciously, and apart from the mental strain that this creates, it makes the children sceptical about the motives of the parents, especially the father. They feel that any affection that the parents show to them, taken with the partiality they show to one of them who is doing well at school or college, is to be set down to calculations of self-interest. They are never convinced that the parental admonitions and punishments are for their good.

The suspicion is heightened when the children find that all the concern that the parents show for their future welfare is not accompanied by any eagerness to promote their



present welfare in the light of the desires which they have as young people, even when reasonable and natural. This deprivation begins in childhood with the reluctance to spend money on toys and playthings, and continues later in regard to books, clothes, and amusements. The plea is usually poverty or at all events insufficient means. This plea is often wholly scouted by the children, because whatever the income of the family they hardly ever see the parents grudging the satisfaction of their own desires. The father might be either a glutton and spend money on himself, or a maniac about house property and be saving every pice to build a hovel at the end of his life. The mother, on the other hand, is never seen to go either without saris or gold ornaments. They never deprive themselves on the ground of money. The children have to extort what they want by gross misbehaviour, and I have seen a son breaking open the cash-box of his father to buy a pullover, and the mother who was standing by justifying it. Generally speaking, the children never take the plea of poverty of their parents at its face value, and when they are deprived on what they consider unjustifiable grounds they grow up as malignants and malcontents.

On the other hand, indulgence of the children, which is very widespread in this country, does not make the children think better of their parents. They set down the liberality to weakness or to the desire of the parents to assert their own importance by a show of wealth through the clothes of the children. "A spoilt child," says an English moralist, "never loves its mother." I would cap that saying by adding : A spoilt child never respects its father. To be frank, disinterested love of the children is very rare in our society. Even at its most disinterested, parental love in India, and more particularly that of the mother, is intense possessiveness. They think of the children as their property and resent every attempt of a child to become independent in his personal life.

The result is hardly better when the parents show themselves anxious about the career and worldly prosperity of their sons and daughters for their own good. The solicitude that young people see in their parents about themselves

on this score is not attributed to any high conception of living, but only to the desire of the parents to make the life of their children a continuation of the worldly and materialistic lives they have chosen for themselves. The sons feel that they will be joked to jobs for which they have no love only for the sake of money, the daughters feel that they will be sold to young men whom they do not love, for the same money.

This feeling ties up with another which is the basic reason for which the sons and daughters in present-day India do not respect their parents. In every thing and at every moment the saddening conviction is forced on them that their parents not only do not have any idealism, but do not even understand idealism. It cannot be said that their judgement is unfair in the case of a majority of the fathers. Most parents are sordidly materialistic and worldly, and do not show any appreciation of the intangible values of life.

I meet a very large number of young people, who come to see me because they are interested in my ideas. In fact, three-quarters of those who visit me in my home in Delhi are young people below thirty. So I have had opportunities for finding out what they think of their parents and of elderly people generally. Seeing how worldly they are, they often say in the light of their own ideas and passions : "Perhaps in your time young people in India did not think so deeply or feel so intensely." This means the young people give a retrospective effect to the stolidity, insensibility, and the materialism they see in the parental generation, and do not credit them with a youthful personality at any time. Of course, young persons are always over-conscious of the ideas and emotions which pass through their minds and value themselves most highly for these. As Dr. Johnson said : "Youth enters the world with very happy prejudices in her own favour." But in India we have provided enough justification for this prejudice, and almost made it a condition of self-respect in our youth. There are few fathers in India whom their sons and daughters can respect for idealism. There is hardly any realization among the parents that family life is kept alive at its best only by idealism, not by prosperity.

To sum up, the unitary family in our society presents three types in its normal working : the family in which there is no common bond of affection and understanding and consequently no deep interest of the members in one another; the family in which there are continuous personal clashes and incurable maladjustment; and the family in which there is peace and agreement on the basis of a common surrender of the parents and the children to gross worldliness and materialism. Of course, there are exceptions, but these exception only prove the rule.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Last Words*

“There is no duty we so much underate as the duty of being happy.”

—R.L. Stevenson

This is a small, informal, and discursive book which has to justify itself more by its intention than by its contents. However, the aim, I must say, is ambitious, because it is concerned with one of the most difficult things to get in life, namely, happiness, whose pursuit Robert Louis Stevenson calls a duty. This duty is all the more binding on us Indians than perhaps on any other people in the present-day world. There is not only a good deal of unhappiness actually created by circumstances, but we Indians as a people possess a remarkable genius for being unhappy ourselves and making others unhappy. We have even learnt to cherish and gloat over our unhappiness and make it a perverse enjoyment.

Those who wish to form an idea of this all-pervasive unhappiness might read the eleventh chapter of my book, *The Continent of Circe*, which was written on the basis of life-long observation. The conclusion forced on me was so depressing that I had to write in the following vein :

“The situation is tragic, not only pathetic, when seen in its eternal twilight. If any world had and has the right to put up this inscription :

‘Through me you pass into the City of Woe :  
Through me you pass into eternal pain;

Though me among the people lost for aye.  
All hope ... abandon, ye who enter hear.'

The Hindu world has and had that right."

I continued :

"But the Hindus have by their own behaviour made their tragedy pitiful. Deadened by their slow, dull, and benumbed palsy of suffering they have become unheroic, and their absorption in self-pity has made them incapable of analysing their sorrow. They have become even more incapable of perceiving and admitting that any action of theirs might be responsible for it. They will always throw the blame on others."

This book is a modest attempt—I would admit that it is modest only in the scale of the attempt not in its manner, a doctor can hardly afford to exhibit lack of confidence—to counteract this unhappiness and the predisposition to it. But it does not try to deal with human unhappiness at the highest level. That comes from realizing some great purpose or working for it to the best of one's ability. After that it comes from performing one's duties in life without flinching. I might say as well it never comes from any attempt to get all that one desires or hankers for in the worldly way. Limitation of desire is an indispensable prerequisite for happiness. These problems to ensure happiness in life are excluded from this book. It deals only with the problem of being happy with others either in our social or in our family life. This also is great happiness, and a kind of happiness which helps to gain the other kinds of happiness. A man who is not happy with fellowmen and members of his family may find a compensating happiness in his vocation or in his duty, but he will never be fully happy.

But happiness here is more difficult to find than in the higher spheres, for it makes greater demands on our capacity to be unselfish. Joy in creative endeavour can be had even if a man is terribly egocentric. A man who does his duty may be an out-and-out prig, who is a man with a

very favourable view of the self. But happiness in the company of others can never come without unselfishness and forgetfulness of self. The person from whose company we expect the greatest happiness in our relations with others is the wife. But if any husband thinks that he can get that happiness by expecting more from the wife than he is ready to give her he will be dreadfully mistaken. It is the same with children, who even as babies have an uncanny sense and perception of unselfish love. So the first requisite for getting happiness in the company of others is to learn to love unselfishly.

But an intellectual requisite also exists. Nothing in life can be taken for granted. We act in life on the basis of unconscious fundamental assumptions, which we adopt without analysing them. This is wrong. At every step even the most trivial activities of life call for intellectual analysis of their motives and methods. A rigorous intellectual analysis of our aspirations and doings often enables us to shed those which make for unhappiness and adopt those which give happiness. So in this book I have also tried to analyse the conditions of our social and family life with a view to finding what is giving rise to the prevailing unhappiness and dissatisfaction. And I also hope, with this analysis will also be found positive suggestions for getting happiness out of others. The suggestion which matters most and is implicit throughout the book is that to make others happy is the surest way of getting happiness for ourselves.

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